

# JUDAISM

## **THE STATE OF ISRAEL — THE VIEW FROM THE RIGHT**

**Rael Jean and Erich Isaac**

**David J. Schnall**

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## **FREEDOM AND SLAVERY IN I. B. SINGER**

**Nili Wachtel**

## **A BATTERED PEOPLE SYNDROME?**

**S. Levin**

## **THE GARDEN OF EDEN REVISITED**

**Adrien Janis Bledstein**

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JUDAISM, conceived as a free and non-partisan organ, is dedicated to the creative discussion and exposition of the religious, moral and philosophical concepts of Judaism and their relevance to the problems of modern society. Through an exploration of the meaning and needs of the Jewish experience, it hopes to widen the channels of communication between Jews and to affirm Jewish verity and vitality to the world at large.

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*American Jewish Congress*

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# JUDAISM

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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a world-view on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

*Judaism* will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God."—*From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

## *The First Reader*

### *Israel and its Arabs*

The problems of policy confronting the State of Israel today are heartrending in their intensity and mind-boggling in their complexity. How should the State of Israel respond to the claims being made by, and on behalf of, the Palestinians? Should there be negotiations with those who have never disavowed and, on the contrary, have often reaffirmed the goal of the destruction of the State of Israel? Does the Jewish claim to the land of Israel obliterate any element of legitimacy to Arab counter-claims? Which is a more practical course likely to achieve the objective of a secure and peaceful Jewish state—the ongoing search for compromise and mutual adjustment between conflicting claims, or the single-minded concentration upon maximum goals such as “the total land of Israel?”

The truth is that no solution advanced is free from pitfalls and perils. It is no wonder, therefore, that people of character and intelligence find themselves arrayed on opposite sides of the barricades. Recently, two papers, written by scholars and dedicated Jews, reached our desk at the same time, quite independently of one another. They present with vigor and conviction two distinct positions on “Israel and its Arabs.” In their paper, “By What Right?” *Rael Jean* and *Erich Isaac* present a vigorous defense of right-wing Israeli nationalism from the days of the Irgun and the Stern group. They argue forcefully that the only goal to be kept in mind is the preservation of the Jewish State. In the face of this overriding consideration, they maintain, there is no need to try to accommodate this goal to the presence of an Arab population in the region. Nor should any recognition be given to the view that there is any legitimacy to Arab claims to national existence in any part of the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

In Israel today, *Gush Emunim*, actively dedicated to establishing Jewish settlements in the West Bank areas populated by Arabs and occupied after the Six Day War, represents basically this point of view in action. In an objective study, the result of detailed and meticulous research, entitled “Gush Emunim: Messianic Dissent and Israeli Politics,” *David J. Schnall* offers a careful, well-documented analysis of this movement, its worldview, its ideology and its practical program, together with a survey of the history of the movement since it was formally organized in 1974. Its activism, its sacrificial fervor, its undoubted idealism and its intransigence have created world-wide interest in it and have helped it achieve significant success in many areas. The present article will, we



believe, remain a primary source for understanding this vital component of the contemporary Israeli scene.

It goes without saying that the Editor of this journal has his own views on these questions and, it may be added, many others discussed in the columns of JUDAISM. As he has indicated again and again, however, the only "line" of JUDAISM is that it has no "line." Its columns are open to all points of view, when presented intelligently and clearly. He has no intention of polemizing with any of the contributors. However, when passions run high, statements that are actually questionable or less than adequate presentations of opposing positions are virtually unavoidable. To close with a cliché, he suggests that readers scrutinize critically everything they read, including even the contents of JUDAISM.

### *Another Look at Purim*

The festival of Purim has always possessed several unusual and even unique features, with regard both to its origin and to its observances. In his paper, "Purim: The Celebration of Dis-Order," *Monford Harris* suggests that many aspects of the holiday, including some that are not well known, perform the psychological function of play-acting by the Jewish people. Thus, Purim brings to Jews a release from the tensions of reality, letting them enter into a world of make-believe. After participating in this procedure which may, with some exaggeration, be described as therapeutic, one gains a truer perception of reality and a greater capacity for dealing with it.

### *Who Is Free?*

No figure in contemporary literature bestrides both the general and the Jewish reading public as majestically as does Isaac Bashevis Singer. His superb powers as a story teller serve as the vehicle for his life-long wrestling with the ultimate questions of good and evil, life and death, the significance and the meaninglessness of existence.

In a penetrating study, entitled "Freedom and Slavery in the Fiction of Isaac Bashevis Singer," *Nili Wachtel* underscores some of the basic motifs in Singer's work, finding a principal preoccupation to be the confusions and frustrations that have come to the modern Jew following the Emancipation and the Enlightenment. The writer is not alone today in our age of nostalgia in giving a negative appraisal to these major phenomena of modern Jewish history. That there were highly significant positive values is a theme muted in this essay. However, Singer is a novelist, not a philosopher and is, therefore, free to choose whatever *personae* he pleases to exhibit his vision. The Wachtel paper reveals its dimensions with skill and sympathy.

*The Creation Story Has a Feminist Slant*

For millennia, the Adam and Eve narrative in Genesis has excited the imagination and affected the thinking of Western man as a major influence on his theological beliefs and moral code.

Archaeological discoveries during the recent past have made it possible to set the Adam and Eve narrative against a larger Oriental background, revealing both similarities and differences of great significance.

In her paper, "The Genesis of Humans: The Garden of Eden Revisited," *Adrien Janis Bledstein* offers an interpretation of this classic Biblical narrative, finding in it evidence of humor and satire not usually associated with it. It need hardly be pointed out that her interpretation of Genesis (chapters 1 to 3), takes its place among many others that have been proposed by scholars and thinkers, including one by the Editor of this journal. The present paper is a stimulating contribution to this ongoing discussion.

*Judaism's View of the World*

One of the most commonly expressed generalizations regarding differences between Judaism and Christianity is that the Jewish religion is "this-worldly" in emphasis, while Christianity is "otherworldly." Like virtually all easy generalizations, this statement is imprecise at best and simplistic at worst. In his paper, "Jewish Otherworldliness," *Bernard J. Bamberger* analyzes the meanings, both explicit and implied, in the term "otherworldliness," and argues that the otherworldly strain runs deep in Judaism.

As a rabbi, the author is not interested merely in research into the past. His concern is with the all-but-universal preoccupation of contemporary American Jews with "the enjoyment of life" as the be-all and end-all of existence, a philosophy which seeks support in a misunderstanding of "Jewish this-worldliness."

*A Proof for the Existence of God*

Ours has been described as "the age of anxiety". One manifestation of this complex has been religious anxiety, the quest for security that may be found in a strongly rooted faith. In his paper, "Religious Anxiety and the Experience of God," *Moshe HaLevi Spero* discusses the widespread quest for God that is characteristic of our day and seeks to infer from its universality evidence for the existence of God. He is, thus, reformulating one of the classical "proofs" of medieval philosophy, the ontological argument.

*How Jews Differ*

In considering the complex of miracles that have been associated with Jewish survival, one is tempted to fall back upon the *Dayenu* motif from the Passover Seder, by presenting a long list of the wonders that have marked the Jewish pilgrimage through time.

S. Levin, in his article, "A Battered People Syndrome?" calls attention to one aspect of the miracle of Jewish survival that is generally overlooked. It is not merely that Jews have endured the rigors of persecution, expulsion, spoliation and massacre, climaxed by the horrors of the Holocaust. They have been able to avoid many, if not most, of the pathological symptoms that accompany a battered personality. While many scars have left their mark on the Jew physically, it is cause for wonder and gratitude that the psyche of the Jew has remained basically sound. This augurs well for the future life of the Jewish people, no matter what trials may lie ahead.

*God and the People of Israel in a Contractual Relation*

Ever since an anonymous poet lamented: "How odd of God to choose the Jews!" people have marveled or been scandalized by the insistence of the Jewish tradition that Israel stands in a covenantal relationship with God. The assumption that the Creator of the universe and its Governor has chosen to establish a special relation with one small branch of the human family—and, it may be added, even with the entire human race—is an act of colossal *huzpah*. In his paper, "The Covenant—The Leap of *Huzpah*," Bruce S. Warshal embraces the charge and insists that it nevertheless is indispensable for the vitality of Judaism and the survival of the values it contains.

*The Holocaust in Poetry*

It is only now, three decades after the destruction of Hitler, but, unfortunately, not of Hitlerism, that Jews—and a few sensitive and concerned Christians—are able to approach the Holocaust and develop a perspective for dealing with it. This is true even in poetry and *belles lettres*. Yitzhak Katzenelson has been well called "The Threnodist of the Holocaust." His literary output is examined by Noah H. Rosenbloom, who finds in it an abiding value for those who were fortunately spared personal contact with the horrors of Nazism.

**R.G.**



# *By What Right?*

RAEL JEAN and ERICH ISAAC

IN 1965 GEORGES FRIEDMANN WROTE a widely discussed book called *The End of the Jewish People?* in which he argued that Israel, in creating a new nationalism, had made possible the final disappearance of Judaism both in Israel and in the Diaspora. Over a decade later one looks back with affectionate nostalgia to a period when such concerns could command attention. For the challenge today is a total one: to the Israeli nationalism which Friedmann felt could be separated in some sense from Zionism; to Zionism, the specifically Jewish nationalism; and to the survival of world Jewry. While the challenge to Israel as a sovereign political entity was, of course, maintained consistently by the Arab states, now it has immeasurably broadened, resonating among the most remote and diverse publics.

The symbolic obliteration of Israel via such maneuvers as dropping her from international sports contests, giving status to the PLO in organizations like the ILO and FAO, expelling Israel from UNESCO, and the UN General Assembly's defining Zionism as "racism" does not extinguish the State of Israel. But it is a step in that direction which jokes about the demise of the UN should not disguise. Symbolic obliteration constitutes a kind of anticipatory preparation of the rest of the world for the acceptance of Israel's disappearance. The early church extinguished the old Israel symbolically long before efforts were made in the name of the faith to annihilate Jews physically.<sup>1</sup> So, too, in Nazi Germany, the Jew was symbolically annihilated before his physical destruction was attempted.

The reasons for the Arabs' concentrated propaganda assault, which finds its most dramatic expression in the UN actions, are obvious. Propaganda serves to neutralize the potential allies of the victim and hopes to co-opt them in the assault; it strengthens the morale of one's own people and the resolution of one's allies; and, most important perhaps, weakens the resolve of the prey to resist. To achieve the last target it is necessary that the propaganda have some foundation in truth. The assault on Israel is distinguished not by its factual truth, for where supposed facts are listed

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1. The survival of Jews in a debased state, as witness to the truth of Christianity, is a theological teaching that goes back to the early Church Fathers. It often led to efforts by the church to save Jewish communities from the consequences of its own anti-Jewish preachings.

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against Israel they are generally outright lies and do not resonate in Israel; its “truth” lies, rather, in the use of fundamental values of the intended victim to draw up the indictment. Self-determination, national liberation, socialism, secularism, democracy are values which Israel embraces and in their name its existential legitimacy is denied.

By holding up to Israel its own values, the Arabs have won for themselves the most valuable of all allies: not merely internal critics, but those who conceive of themselves as standard bearers of moral values within Israeli society. Indeed, it is not widely recognized, but basic elements of the present Arab ideology were forged by Israeli intellectuals who pioneered the idea that a solution to the Arab-Israel conflict was to be found in giving territorial fulfillment to a specifically Palestinian nationalism. This arose at a time when the Arab world still embraced the ideology of pan-Arabism and defined the rights of the refugees from Palestine within the framework of the Arab right to dominate the entire region. The absence of a formal alliance between internal and external critics is not important; what is important is that the outside challenge and the inside political and societal critique are mutually supportive and effective in undermining internal popular certainty about the legitimacy of one’s political existence and in diminishing world support.

The vulnerability to attack in moral terms has been greatly heightened in Israel because its dominant state-founding elites viewed their mission as the implementation of goals that were not exclusively religious or national, and they looked to outside approval for validation of the societal building enterprise. The achievement of the transcendental goal—a “just society” or, in more political terms, socialism—implied the need for participation in a universal, anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggle as well, which was also supposed to satisfy the special national needs of Jews. And success was largely measured by the evaluation of outsiders, especially those seen as representing liberal and progressive opinion. Ben Gurion’s famous phrase, “It’s not what the Gentile thinks that counts, but what we do,” is a tribute precisely to how much emphasis was placed upon what the Gentile thought.

The yearning for the world’s esteem was altogether understandable as a search for psychological comfort in the decades prior to statehood, a period of relentless, official anti-Semitic exhortation in most continental media of communication and of anti-Jewish measures almost everywhere. Even then it placed restraints upon policy options and, on occasion, led to behavior that was itself of questionable morality. For Zionism had to validate itself, as it were, by turning anti- into pro-Jewish attitudes. But the resulting preoccupation with making sure that the non-Jew understood that the “new Jew” was doing the right thing in Palestine produced dysfunctional approaches to practical problems. The policy of *ḥavlagah*, which placed the narrowest and most literal interpretation upon the word “defense,” excluded offensive military operations against Arab terrorist bases during much of the 1930s. Certainly this restraint reinforced Arab

perception of the Jews as cowardly “children of death.” For politically important segments of British opinion the very outrages of Arab terror established the Arab anti-Zionist case more firmly by proving how strongly the Arabs felt, while the restraint shown by Jews confirmed deep-seated uncomplimentary stereotypes of the Jewish character. When the dissident Jewish underground (Irgun) met terror with counter-terror, the Jewish official leadership benefited from the restraints that this put upon Arab military initiatives while, at the same time, it condemned as outrageous the acts of the dissidents, a morally luxurious position. The obsession with moral purity permitted the leadership to embark upon policies that were morally highly questionable: it made possible the *saison* in which, from 1944-47, hundreds of Jewish dissidents were tracked down, captured, imprisoned by the Haganah and many turned over to the British for deportation to Africa.

After statehood, the unusual vulnerability to the opinion of others remained. Terms like “community of nations” and “moral conscience of mankind” assumed a real meaning for Israelis who often followed policies on the basis of moral rectitude and their endorsement in right thinking socialist circles, rather than on the basis of practical interests.<sup>2</sup> And, yet, in the aftermath of the 1967 war, Israel suddenly found itself assailed by representatives of precisely those camps whose approval had been deemed crucial to the validation of the state for sins like “colonialism,” “imperialism,” or “racism,” all of which its leaders themselves deemed most abhorrent.

Israel's vulnerability to ideological assault was greatly heightened by both the disappearance of the acute needs as well as by the erosion of the countervailing beliefs and values which had once served as protection against the potential undermining of the Zionist position by arguments drawn from socialist and liberal democratic premises. In the 1930s and 1940s the desperate need for a refuge for European Jews had given the Zionist claim a strength and urgency that brooked no debate, and, after the war, had endowed it with great political effectiveness. But now there was not only a loss of that sense of acute need, there was a loss of the faith which Jews had kept over the centuries as to Judaism's absolute and eternal claim to the Land of Israel. This belief is one of the cornerstones of traditional Jewish theology and ritual. There is no need to belabor this point, which is well known, as are the difficulties which modern Reform ideologists have experienced in their attempts to expunge it from both ritual and theology. Avowedly secular movements within Zionism translated the religious claim into a secular, social-ecological one. For example, the Hashomer Hazair, a romantic Jewish youth movement which, in the

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2. It would be a profound mistake to think that long-range political interests were the motivation for such Israeli actions as: voting for the admission of Algeria and Red China to the UN and against that of Spain, voting and speaking repeatedly against the Union of South Africa, and refraining from diplomatic contacts with Spain when these were invited in the 1950s (although Franco had a good record in saving Jewish lives in World War II).

30s, became a revolutionary Marxist movement, had as part of its ideology the indivisibility of the Land of Israel. The arguments of its spokesmen against the various partition plans were explicitly in terms of the impossibility of tampering with the historical-natural unity of the Land.

The protection afforded by these attitudes against a weakening of certainty in one's existential right was not complete. The Hashomer Hazair was willing to share sovereignty over the land with the Arabs, seeing in binationalism not merely the solution to the conflict of nationalisms but an ideologically comfortable alternative, since it provided for the potential unity of Arab and Jewish "masses" against their exploiters. And when Britain, attempting to undermine the Jewish National Home, advocated the establishment of democratically elected institutions in Palestine in which the Arabs were bound at that time to be overwhelmingly predominant, the Jewish leadership, unable to deny the validity of principles of representative government, resorted to a parity formula. Even greater concessions were made, but they were motivated by urgent need, not by ideological uncertainty. While accepting partition proposals as a basis for discussion in the desperate 1930s, Zionist leaders also affirmed their belief that the land belonged to the Jews. Weizmann, prepared to put off fulfillment of the entire claim to a distant, perhaps Messianic, age, asserted that the Jews could not abandon it "without ceasing to be a nation."<sup>3</sup>

With the achievement of statehood, the devotion that had once been given to the Land of Israel was absorbed by the state which was soon felt by many to be identical with the Land. Israel's Declaration of Independence does not embody a claim to further territory; the bases for Israel's claim are cited as the ancient right, the Balfour Declaration given substance in the Mandate, and the UN Resolution of 1947, without any hint that the territory involved differs from one to the other. As a fully Zionist or Jewish state, while recognizing the uncertainty concerning the nature of the historical borders, Israel would have had to define what the Holy Land meant territorially. Even from a pragmatic point of view, the failure to do so was a mistake, for it meant that the Arabs had an instant grievance, since they denied the Jews all national rights while the Jews had won complete national fulfillment and made no claims at all.

The State became the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish dream of restoration. The mass immigration was of survivors of the Holocaust and of Jews from Asia and Africa, for most of whom Zionist debates were unfamiliar matters. The State that offered them succour and rehabilitation commanded their full emotional attachment, while its leaders were so idealized, not only by survivors but by Diaspora Jewry as well, that they commanded a quasi-religious devotion as bearers of the Jewish national miracle. For those born after World War II, the State was the only reality to have been experienced, and was taken for granted as the embodiment of

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3. *The New Judaea*, London (August-Sept. 1937): 214.

the Zionist vision. The Israeli educational system reinforced this quite natural attitude. Thus, while the external constraints on the State were severe and evident, it would be false to say that it is those constraints which explain the emotional and ideological acceptance of the legitimacy of the Rhodes armistice state.

Zionists who were religiously orthodox, while not losing the sense of entitlement, had turned inward after 1949, even though the ideal community which they sought to build was clearly defined differently from that of the secular left. These religious Zionists were prepared to accept partition as partial fulfillment of the divine redemptive scheme of ingathering, but to see total fulfillment as coming only after the people had prepared themselves for it by conducting themselves according to the laws and mores of a religious society, which the public showed no signs of doing. Such Zionists could then internalize the very Messianic pietistic quietism which they had once hotly fought in the religious Jewish community in relation to larger sections of the Promised Land not in Jewish hands. Thus, although the claim was advanced in some quarters that provinces of Judea and Samaria are traditionally the most sacred and, once under Jewish control must not, according to principles of Halakhah, be yielded, they could be seen in purely political terms by religious Zionists. A distinction was made between the Land, which is forever holy, and the question of sovereignty. Of course, not all religious Zionists were prepared to sever the religious from the political realm in relation to the Land of Israel and, hence, resistance to relinquishing Judea and Samaria remained especially strong among the religious. But the Gush Emunim movement, which embarked upon a program of demonstrations and attempted settlement in Samaria in defiance of the government, did not reflect the attitudes of a majority of the religious leadership.

With the loss of the ideological protection that desperate need and absolute conviction of the legitimacy of ownership had earlier provided, Israel was left to face the Arab attack upon her existence, an attack reflecting a deep-rooted hostility that has never—and this was true from the beginning of the Yishuv—seemed real to Zionist leaders. For it is not true, as writers like Amos Elon have claimed, that the early Zionists did not see the Arabs; rather, they saw them in an idealized way or through the distorting lenses of their ideologies. One source of the romanticism was a Jewish belief—predating Rousseau—in the natural goodness of the common man, specifically the peasant, who misbehaved only because he was misled by those in power who used him in their murderous attacks on the Jew, and who was, thus, as much a victim as those he attacked. The Russian muzhik is a most ambiguous figure in Jewish traditional perception, alternating between murderous ferocity and an almost saintly, naive purity. These attitudes, still central to the most varied modern political mythologies concerning peasantry, were carried over by Jews to the Arab peasant.

An additional factor was the romanticizing, by much of nineteenth century Jewish scholarship, of the entire Islamic world. Cousinhood, racial brotherhood, common Semitic heritage, a “golden age of symbiosis between Arab and Jew” were conceptions which convinced many who were unaware of the repressive attitudes of Moslem regimes to their religious minorities, that there were no “real” barriers between Arab and Jew.

Secular ideologies were also important in blinding important elements in the leadership of the nascent Jewish community in Palestine. Nationalist opposition by the Arabs was defined as temporary; it would disappear as soon as the Jews would succeed in educating the Arabs as to their genuine common class interest with the Jewish worker. Progressive regimes in the Arab world became the answer for the socialists, for these regimes would recognize the progressive character of the Jewish State, and would share with it the shaping of the region, so that socialist principles would then be applied within compatible Jewish and Arab national frameworks.

Also important in fostering misperception was the fact that the correct perceptions were held by the wrong people. To whatever spectrum of the left the Zionist leaders in Palestine may have belonged, whether orthodox Marxism or humanist socialism, they were united in the belief that the achievement of the good society necessitated the hegemony of labor over the community's economic and political life. It turned out that those elements in the Yishuv who were opposed to that hegemony were those who understood best the need for fighting against the British and harbored the fewest illusions about the Arabs. These elements refused to accept the political authority of the Yishuv's institutions and to abide by their decisions. The battle between the left and the dissident organizations distracted attention from the Arabs and precluded any possibility that the left could come to share the perspective of the internal antagonist.

Whatever its ideological sources, the Israeli leadership's perpetual misperception of the Arab threat meant that the State was permanently caught off guard. While everyone is aware of the way in which the leadership was taken by surprise in the Yom Kippur War, there is less recognition of the way that it was surprised by the 1967 war. Until a short time before Nasser closed the Tiran Straits, Israel's Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, had been talking hopefully of applying to the Middle East conflict “the spirit of Tashkent,” which signalled a rapprochement between India and Pakistan under the leadership of the USSR.

And the traditional perspectives, in the halcyon years of the French conflict with the Arabs over Algeria, could even be passed off as the stuff of political realism, earning for Israel practical alliances of great importance. In a defensive position, ever eager for and expectant of peace, trusting the efficacy of time to lead to a reshaping of the Arab states themselves into progressive societies, willing to share its “know-how” with



others, Israel earned good marks with the outside world, or at least with that segment which was defined as important because of its progressive character.

In the aftermath of the 1967 war the bankruptcy of Israel's political thinking became evident and yet the perspectives remained unaltered, with consequences whose danger became manifest only after the 1973 war. Without belief in the legitimacy of her title to the territories that she had taken, although these included the core area of the historic Land of Israel and had been won in a war of survival, and psychologically intensely vulnerable to charges of "imperialism" and "oppression," Israel's solution was to treat the territories as commodities exchangeable for peace. When the Arabs showed no interest in the exchange, the leadership fell back on its traditional view that time would surely bring the Arabs to abandon their unreasonable and reactionary animosity. Only a few months before the 1973 war, Foreign Minister Abba Eban was saying: "We thought they would explore a peace settlement . . . the expectation has not been fulfilled. Our error was not in basic appraisal but an unduly sanguine view of time."<sup>4</sup> There were some within the leadership who, no doubt, believed that a return of territories would never materialize, but they, too, saw no harm in the official line of "territories for peace," which was seen as a fine public relations position.

Actually, the position produced a great deal of harm. Externally, Israel's stance became incomprehensible; internally, a guilt culture was fostered; and, in the long range, new credibility was given to the Arab propaganda which asserted that Israel had no title to any part of Palestine. Where Israel's leadership imagined that the policy of territories for peace would amaze the world by its generosity, the real effect was to foster incomprehension why Israel did not return the territories more quickly. There was soon virtually no support for the Israeli government position, even among generally sympathetic western groups and organizations. Everywhere, Israel's return of the territories was seen as the *sine qua non* for peace. After all, Israel admitted that the territories belonged to the Arabs, and it seemed obvious that she should return them to remove the Arab grievance now seen as the cause of the failure to make peace.

Internally, also, Israel was defined as the guilty party. As the years after 1967 dragged by without political action, a movement arose which blamed Israel for preventing peace. Israel, said the movement's intellectuals, was becoming a garrison state, institutionalizing injustice by preventing national self-determination for the Palestinians of the West Bank, exposing herself to the demographic danger that Jews would be swamped in their own state by the tidal Arab birthrate, and destroying her moral image abroad. Israeli fears of destruction were identified as a "Masada complex," an inappropriate obsession with the historic experience of isolation in a hostile world prior to liquidation. Ironically, the Masada complex became

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4. *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, April 24, 1970.

a fashionable term in the months immediately preceding the Arab attack on Yom Kippur.

But, perhaps most serious, the implicit Israeli admission that the area of greatest historical significance within Palestine did not belong to the Jews lent credence to Arab anti-Zionist propaganda. For the Arabs, the presence of the Jews in part of Palestine had not negated their own claim to all of it, whereas for the Jews, the Arab presence, even though the Jews had physical control of the land, made Jews act as if they had no title. Since the Zionist claim was ultimately a historical-religious one to a land that, until only recently, however thinly populated, had been predominantly occupied by Arabs, and the Arabs made sure that the world was aware of this fact, the implicit confession by the Jews that their claim did not hold for Judea and Samaria, the area that was religiously central, was bound to cast doubt upon the entire claim. Somehow, it now appeared, the intrinsic connection between Jews and the ancient homeland had been severed. Except for Jerusalem, even those territorial changes which the leadership of Israel was prepared to demand, changes embodied in the Allon Plan, for example, were defended only in terms of security considerations.

What is surprising about the Yom Kippur War is how little impact it had on Israeli attitudes. Rather pathetically, the government argued that the war vindicated its own prior policies. Foreign Minister Abba Eban saw in the Geneva talks "the fulfillment of political targets which we did not reach after the Six Day War" and the Labor Alignment journal, *Ot*, said that the Geneva talks were " . . . a victory for Israeli political doctrine greater than any military victory."<sup>5</sup> To be sure, Abba Eban did not long remain Foreign Minister. But the protest movements which drove several key cabinet members out of the government were explicitly non-ideological. Much was said about the quality of life, the admittedly unbearable and inefficient bureaucracy and the politicization of life, including the army's upper ranks, but this emphasis upon civic virtue did not lead to a reassessment of Israel's policy and role in the region and the world. In fact, key concerns of the protest movements vitiated any possibility of real change, for by concentrating on such things as the undemocratic process by which party leaders were named, they defined all parties as equally inadequate and did not even attempt to make the most immediately practicable sharp change within Israel by bringing to power the political opposition.

The counsel of the majority of Israeli and Western Jewish intellectuals could be summed up in the word "adapt." Israel was told to adapt to the new realities which, to most of those who gave the advice, did not seem very different from the old realities which had simply not been recog-

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5. The Land of Israel Movement also arose in criticism, from the opposite perspective, of the stagnation produced by the government's policy. For an analysis of both movements and their impact upon government policy see Rael Jean Isaac, *Israel Divided: Ideological Politics in the Jewish State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

6. *Ot*, December 6, 1973.

nized earlier. Kissinger,—who, from the outset, made clear his belief that, while Israel might have won the 1973 war “tactically” she had lost it “strategically,” and that was the only way that mattered, and that Israel must eventually return to lines close to those of the 1949 armistice,—became a hero to the Israeli left. Shlomo Avineri, now Director General of Israel’s Foreign Ministry, who had emerged as an advocate of the creation of a Palestinian state or entity on the West Bank after 1967, did not go so far as to promise that the Arabs would cease to fight if Israel returned the territories taken in 1967, but he did argue that Egypt, Israel’s most formidable antagonist, would fight with “less enthusiasm” if the Sinai were restored to it.<sup>7</sup>

Even those few Jewish intellectuals abroad who did not share such naivete, but provided penetrating analyses of aspects of the conflict in the light of the 1973 war, could, in the end, put forward only conventional “solutions.” Three of the best articles, all of which appeared in *Commentary*, by Theodore Draper, Bernard Lewis and Norman Podhoretz, all illustrate the enormous power which the traditional perspectives exert over even the best informed Jewish minds. Draper engages in what appears to be fundamental criticism of Kissinger and American policy, but his conclusion indicates that his differences are merely tactical, for he calls for the same territorial changes that Kissinger seeks from the Israelis. Bernard Lewis devotes most of his article to ruling out the PLO as a partner for peace negotiations. But, as a suitable alternative, he offers Jordan, or the leadership of a new state to be established on the West Bank without PLO participation, though, as he himself concedes, either of these might easily turn out to be the PLO, which could overthrow the Hashemites, the leadership of the new independent state, or both. Podhoretz writes of the “abandonment of Israel” by the United States, but by dismissing the “small, strident minority” in Israel that wishes to keep the territories, he implicitly endorses the same old “territories for peace” formula.<sup>8</sup>

Once Israel, under United States pressure, had embarked upon the policy of relinquishing territories, the need for clinging to the old views concerning Arab hostility became greater than ever, for it was only in those terms that Israel’s policies made any sense. If Arab hostility was irremediable and the destruction of the State a continuing goal which Israeli concessions could not affect except insofar as retreats would foster greater hopes of success, a policy of negotiating territories for peace was doomed. If there were those in the government who themselves believed this, the belief could never be stated, for it would mean that Israeli concessions were dictated purely by outside pressure and that the Israeli

7. *Maariv*, January 18, 1974.

8. Theodore Draper, “The United States and Israel: Tilt in the Middle East,” *Commentary*, April 1975; Bernard Lewis, “The Palestinians and the PLO,” *Commentary*, January 1975; Norman Podhoretz, “The Abandonment of Israel,” *Commentary*, July 1976.

government did not, in fact, govern, or, rather, that it merely exercised autonomy in internal affairs.

In a sense, of course, what was, and is, being done is to buy time—time to rebuild the shattered officer corps, replenish and update military hardware and to revise military doctrines and implement them operationally; time to allow the population a respite from the strain and casualties of war; time for changes in world politics that might remove pressures from Israel and time for changes in the Arab world which might preoccupy them with problems other than Israel. The government could not defend its policy explicitly in terms of the need to buy time, for that would endorse the basic conceptions of the opposition and make the disagreement purely tactical. The policy is defended as offering the chance for peace to be reached in stages, but with the assurance that, should peace fail to result, time will have made the army stronger.

And, yet, the consequences of a falsely optimistic orientation to the conflict are extremely dangerous. Above all, such an orientation arouses false expectations. If the population is taught to believe that peace can be achieved, then, should it not, Israel must be at least partially to blame. That this is more than an imaginary danger is already clear from the problems which Israel has with high school youth, among whom a basic questioning of the State's policies and legitimacy is now current, and has been for some time. (This phenomenon is praised by the Hebrew University's Professor Jacob Talmon as a "moral awakening!"<sup>9</sup>) The problem is aggravated by the educational system which strives to portray the Arab-Israel conflict in a balanced way and underplays negative aspects of neighboring Arab societies in the effort to accent the positive.

For the public, this perspective also leads to enormous confusion. On the one hand, it is told that Sadat is serious about wishing to take his country out of the war and that an overall settlement is possible. On the other hand, on a day-to-day basis, the government makes demands that are more appropriately geared to expectations of war. The public is asked to make severe economic sacrifices, including the acceptance of extended reserve service, the abolition of hitherto exempt categories and an enormous increase in taxation. Even in the short term the reaction to these conflicting signals has not been promising, and there is a pervasive mood that one had best enjoy what one can while one can. Time, which the government hopes will work to Israel's benefit, works internally to undermine national cohesion, while a sober policy of urging sacrifice in the face of inevitably approaching warfare might have reinforced it.

For the Diaspora, the benefits of the Israeli government's relentless official optimism are more apparent than real. To be sure, the political problems of the Diaspora are simplified. American Jews, to take the most important community, can at once support the policies of the American

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9. *Haaretz*, December 7, 1973.

administration, support the Israeli government and avoid a challenge to the values of their own intellectual elite and leftward leaning, generally alienated, younger generation. The danger can be avoided of having to test the amount of support that can, in fact, be mustered within American Jewry on issues that both run counter to avant garde cultural trends and which involve opposition to the government on what are perceived, regardless of their wider ramifications, as specifically Jewish matters. Yet, by underwriting Israeli government policy, American Jewry becomes identified with it—and, in the minds of their fellow countrymen, may ultimately seem responsible for it. Thus, to take the most obvious example, in supporting the Israeli government's decision to demand American technicians in Sinai and supporting passage of a multibillion dollar aid package, a good part of it associated with the expense involved in the withdrawal from the Canal (loss of oil, new defense lines etc.) American Jewry became identified with potentially unpopular American policy. Much of Israel's popularity has come from its insistence that it neither needed nor wanted American personnel. With that claim undermined, Israel can become, in the minds of the American public, merely another one of those burdensome and parasitic client states, and American Jews an interest group that wants to enforce this burden upon the American public. General Brown's statements merely indicate the extent to which this view has already developed.

But the greatest danger posed by the perspective of Israel's leadership lies in the future. For, while circumstances may change in a way that is favorable to Israel, all military victories will turn into political defeats if the framework within which Israel approaches her existence in the ancestral land and her role as a power in the region do not change. If Israel had chosen to assert herself in 1967 as a power determined to exert control over the banks of the Suez Canal and as a factor in the ultimate disposition of Middle Eastern oil, she might, indeed, have encountered universal disapproval, but she would necessarily have been taken more seriously as a geopolitical factor and, as circumstances changed, redefinition could have occurred. At the very least, groups within a variety of countries would have been created which saw Israel as their country's interest—e.g., those in the United States who were sceptical of détente and concerned about growing Soviet naval power in the Indian Ocean—and the minority could eventually have become the majority position. But no support could develop for a position that Israel herself never took, and Israel made it clear, even in the tense period prior to the June 1967 war, that she had no interest in territory, and in the years following made no secret that, if all the territories were negotiable, the Sinai was the most negotiable of all.

One cannot be certain that Israel would have avoided surprise attack in 1973 if the perspectives of the leadership had been different, although a leadership conscious of the unremitting character of Arab hostility might have reacted less cavalierly to the intelligence information of

mounting Arab military preparations. There would surely not have been the same obsession with "image" that prevented the leadership from immediately calling up full reserve strength, let alone striking preemptively once Arab intentions were clear. But, by far most crucial, there would have been awareness, once the war had begun, that Israel had to win. The leadership would have known that, whatever the risks of insisting upon the destruction of the Egyptian forces, the alternative of permitting an ambiguous end to the war would be fatal to Israel's interests. Instead, the leadership lacked any determined target. Asked why the government had accepted the ceasefire, Shimon Peres replied: "The reason for the ceasefire was because it was offered to us. We did not want war, so there was no reason to oppose the ceasefire."<sup>10</sup> The leadership even saw something of value in the promise held out by Kissinger of negotiations with the Arabs as a return for the ceasefire.

What the leadership has yet to recognize is that either Israel will be a regional power or it will cease to exist. Only in the shortest term can the State survive as an international welfare case, subsidized, armed, guaranteed, its borders patrolled and electronic surveillance stations manned by one or more powers. This is especially true when such an Israel offers no benefits in return, but exacerbates relations with neighboring countries who do have something to offer. While recognition grows that Israeli dependence is dangerous to her survival, the suggestions for countering that dependence now being offered will only make the situation worse. The strategy of nuclear deterrence advocated by Robert Tucker can only result in giving Israel no other option but the nuclear one, especially since the strategy is seen as a decisive inducement to Israeli withdrawal.<sup>11</sup> But once Israel's territorial indefensibility is seen by all as making nuclear warfare the only possible kind, the Arabs cannot but perceive that this is the kind of warfare where they have the greatest advantage. In terms of atomic warfare, Israel has but a single population center; once that is destroyed in a surprise attack, Israel's capacity to wage war is finished. For any kind of rational deployment of nuclear weapons which counts upon a second strike capability, a much larger territory is needed than Israel within the 1949 boundaries.

But the next Arab-Israeli war is likely to occur before the region is inevitably committed to nuclear holocaust. And the danger is that even that war, assuming it is won on the battlefield, will not be able to transform the political consciousness of the victor. Jochanan Bloch, the Israeli philosopher, has noted the deep cultural roots—Bloch traces them to Biblical times—for the Jews' avoidance of political targets.

As Agnon sees it, all the Jew wanted was to serve his God and make a decent living. More recently, all he wanted was to nurture the community dedi-

10. *Jerusalem Post*, October 30, 1973.

11. Robert W. Tucker, "Israel and the United States: From Dependence to Nuclear Weapons?" *Commentary*, November 1975.



cated to the fostering of authentic human relationships and the settlement of the land. In any event, what he always wanted was to avoid the rough and tumble, the wretchedness and glory of political life, and to reject sovereignty with its inextricable component of awfulness. Hence, the Jew is reluctant to accept the consequences of his own strength; he moves over; he wants less; always less—and in his heart is the burning belief, which is also the arrogant presumption, that he is entitled to a morally better existence . . .<sup>12</sup>

Unless the apolitical, even anti-political ideological components in the thinking of the ruling elite of Israel are identified as such and efforts are made to counteract them, the prognosis is grave. Israel will remain, in Bloch's phrase, "exile-prone."

It is like the development of an ancient Greek tragedy. The warring forces are deeply embedded in the character of the actors. Even if they want to escape their fate, they cannot, because the fate is within themselves. The seed of the disaster that overtakes them is sown within their own souls.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Jochanan Bloch, "Die unpolitische Politik der israelischen Regierung" in *Evangelische Zeitstimmen*, 61/2, Hamburg (1972): 75.

13. Jochanan Bloch, "To Be Prepared for the Evil," *Zot Haaretz*, January 31, 1975.

# *Gush Emunim: Messianic Dissent and Israeli Politics*

DAVID J. SCHNALL

ISRAELI POLITICS, WHILE OFTEN VOLATILE and fiery, has generally remained within the context of recognized bounds. Radical and militant dissent, when it has occurred, has been limited and has rarely garnered the consistent support of even a minority of the Israeli population. Yet, in recent years—particularly in the post 1973-War period—salient forms of protest have surfaced, all indicating that serious change is warranted.

One, in particular, has gained considerable visibility both in Israel and abroad. Gush Emunim, the bloc of the believers, has successfully confronted the army and the security police with its demands for territorial settlement and a hard line, and it has gained numerous concessions for its efforts. Stemming originally from the National Religious Party and the Rav Kook Center for Torah Study, the movement has won adherents from a broad cross-section of Israelis.

Yet, just as it has won considerable support, so it has stimulated strong opposition and conflict. Some feel that the group threatens the viability of Israeli democracy and many of the tenets upon which the young state is based. Others fear one part or another of this union of religious messianism with right wing, political chauvinism. They feel that the group does a disservice to Judaism as well as to the cause of peace.

The earliest roots of Gush Emunim as a movement may be traced to the immediate post-1967 War period. Though its career as an independent movement would await a second war, much of its ideology was presented under the aegis of the Land of Israel Movement. Made up of intellectuals, demobilized soldiers and kibbutz people, it demanded the immediate annexation of occupied territories and their mass settlement.

Land of Israel activity may be divided into two areas of settlement. Religious elements were the first to populate the Hebron region and Ezion. Included among them were former residents from the Ezion communities of the pre-1948 period. Many were to join the Gush later and help form its leadership.

Parallel was a large group of secular activists, among them members of Labor and Mapam Kibbutzim, who concentrated on the settlement of

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the north, where their earliest achievement was the creation of Kibbutz Merom Hagolan, near Kunetra, in July, 1967. The participation here of Mapam notables has been a source of embarrassment to that party, which staunchly opposes unauthorized settlement. Nevertheless, the Land of Israel Movement never gained popularity, remaining a decentralized group of activists whose settlement intentions were largely their own, as attested by their poor showing in the 1969 election.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, contemporaneous rumblings were felt within the National Religious Party (N.R.P.) which was top-heavy with functionaries and out of touch with the needs of its younger members. At their convention soon after the 1967 War there was a confrontation with this younger contingent, including many of the students of Mercaz Harav Kook, who were much imbued with a spirit of activist Zionism that meant a maximalist politics and an emphasis upon settlement.

For the bulk of the N.R.P.'s veterans, such ideology was an anomaly—perhaps a bit naive, and it was only the judicious decision of the late party leader, Moshe Shapiro, to adopt a strong territorial resolution that prevented the youth faction from pulling out and breaking up the convention. The sense of that resolution was that security and territorial policy should be guided, first by Jewish rights to the ancestral homeland, and, second, by peace.<sup>2</sup> Still, many N.R.P. leaders, trained in the very practical world of Israeli politics, took issue with their young colleagues on religious, social and strategic grounds.

Perhaps the greatest impetus for the formation of the Gush as an independent entity was the 1973 War. Having failed to achieve the elegant and decisive victory to which they were accustomed, the Israelis were left in a state of demoralization, recrimination and self-doubt. Though Gush was still little more than a pressure faction within the N.R.P., it was clear that it seemed to provide a spiritual appeal that was sorely needed during these low times.

The group continued to influence Party decisions over territorial concessions, but it was becoming increasingly evident that Gush had an appeal transcending party lines. Further, it was equally evident that its limitation, within the N.R.P., was by no means an asset—either to its policy goals or to its non-religious supporters, both of which were sources of embarrassment to N.R.P. leaders.<sup>3</sup>

The formal founding of the movement may be dated in February, 1974, when a group of several hundred young N.R.P. members, yeshivah students and activists attended a founding convention at Kfar Ezion. There the movement adopted its name and its loose organizational struc-

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1. For a discussion of the Land of Israel List and the various other participants in the 1969 election, see Don Peretz, "Israel's 1969 Election Issues," *Middle East Journal* (Winter, 1970: 31-46).

2. See interview with Gush Emunim leader, Yoel Bin-Nun, in *The Jerusalem Post* (August 8, 1976).

3. Ibid.

ture, which were followed soon thereafter by a fund-raising and educational network, directed at all who would listen.

### ***Ideology and its Impact***

To understand the beliefs and values which underlie Gush Emunim as a movement is to go far in grasping what motivates its members. Most of them work on a volunteer basis and are prepared to sacrifice much for the cause whose ideology has been a source of envy for others, even those who do not agree with the social or political implications inherent in Gush policy.

At the risk of oversimplifying, it is fair to say that the bulk of the ideology is derived from both religious Judaism and classical, non-socialist Zionism. The source of much of it is the work of the late Chief Rabbi, Abraham Kook, as interpreted by his son, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook and the center of this activity is Yeshivat Mercaz Harav Kook in Jerusalem.

The ideology is reflected in the movement's strong attachment to the Land. In the view of Gush leader, Yochanan Fried, the Jewish concept of holiness, *kedushah*, is not an abstract one, but one which regards attachment to the land as a concrete reality. A link must be forged between it—a "present from God"—and the *kedushah* which also envelops the People and the Torah. This, he argues, is in preparation for the great Redemption for which Jews have prayed for centuries.<sup>4</sup>

Coupled with such messianism is a harsh view of the moral stance and determination of the Israeli leadership. The Government seems to have abandoned those very qualities upon which the country was based and replaced them with a crass materialism and a lack of self-confidence. Instead of a conviction in the justice of its cause, the nation appears to be imbued with a belief in an abstract peace that is slow to come. This, Gush claims, is the most romantic and naive belief of all.<sup>5</sup>

Such thinking, linked with a religious sense of history, has led to an extremely hard line on territorial issues. The Palestinian problem is little more than a creation of Arab propaganda, Gush says. The complexion of the land must be Jewish, and while Arabs may have rights as residents of the land, they can never have *the rights of Israel*. In effect, this means that Arabs may own land but cannot own the Land; there is no Arab territory in Israel.

Naturally, the constant confrontations of the movement with the

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4. Excerpted from a personal interview with Rabbi Yochanan Fried, August, 1976. Unless otherwise noted, much of the following material is drawn from personal interviews with members and leaders of Gush Emunim and their opponents during June, July and August, 1976.

5. Yoel Bin-Nun, "What Stands Above the Law" (Hebrew) *Gush Emunim* (March, 1976): 38. See, also, the interview with an unidentified Gush Spokesman, cited in *The Jerusalem Post* (July 30, 1976).

government have intensified the caustic view of it. The source of government opposition, it argues, is largely partisan, for it irks the leadership that the Gush has begun a series of independent settlements. Since these are outside of the traditional hegemony of the Labor Party—or of any other party—these settlements are independent of government credits, grants and subsidies, and, most importantly, of government control as well.

The Gush has presented a specific set of goals to overcome many of these problems. First and foremost is *hitnaḥalut*. An almost untranslatable word, *hitnaḥalut*, is a combination of settlement and messianism which requires that Jews return to the land out of religious obligation and cultural imperative. This is no “right,” which can be bartered or forfeited; it is nothing less than a prerequisite to the Redemption.

By comparison with *hitnaḥalut*, all other values pale. Democracy represents nothing more than an intermediary phase in the process and it cannot vote away the need to settle. In the words of Rabbi Moshe Levinger:

Democracy can no more vote away Zionism, aliya, settlement, than it can vote that people should stop breathing or speaking. The fate of Eretz Yisrael and a free and whole Jewish life in it are not subject to a majority vote. At its roots our people know this. We are a people that is especially linked to a vision.<sup>6</sup>

The problem is often an educational one, Gush notes, for too often Israeli children are taught to take their culture and history lightly. In recent years, even traditional Zionism has been looked upon with amusement, as a quaint oddity, far more appropriate for foreign fundraisers and Western tourists. This attitude is seen as the result of a faulty marriage between Zionism and socialism. For much of the earlier Zionist movement, social experimentation was as important as settlement, and it all took place within a secular environment. As might be expected, then, when the immediate physical problems dissipated, the pioneering spirit ebbed and future generations were left with the secularism and little else. In the mind of Gush settlers, this emphasis on social form over settlement “dooms Labor Zionism to failure. For us, the most important thing is *hitnaḥalut* and the social form of our settlement is quite secondary.”

*Hitnaḥalut* is also seen as a cure for the nation’s social and economic ills. According to Rabbi Levinger, the problems which the country is experiencing stem from a lack of productive labor, i.e., a dedication to one’s job beyond the material rewards. Rather, the individual has placed his own needs before those of the nation and is interested in getting the highest pay for the least work. This set of priorities will be overturned through a revival of the pioneering spirit for which the nation had once been known. The essential struggle must always be with the Arab States whose only *raison d’être* is to destroy the State of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

6. *The Jerusalem Post* (August 9, 1976).

7. Moshe Levinger, Yochanan Fried and Hanan Porat, “Brief Answers to Timely Questions” (Hebrew) *Gush Emunim* (March, 1976):34.

In order to realize its goals, Gush Emunim has embarked upon a specific set of strategies and tactics which are often almost indistinguishable from those goals. Therein lies the movement's greatest strength, for aside from preaching settlement and an identity with the land, the leadership has joined the rank-and-file in leaving comfortable city homes and moving to undeveloped areas in Hebron and Samaria. The result is an extremely informal and flexible corps of leaders who work side-by-side with other members of the group and represent perhaps the highest caliber of such leadership of any movement in Israel.

At once its greatest success and most important strategy, the leadership of the Gush has become the envy of objective observers as well as of grudging opponents. Thus:

It is hard to find a more authentic leadership than that of Gush Emunim and this is something which their ideological opponents must concede. It is a leadership of personal dedication and willingness to sacrifice, a leadership of responsibility . . . It is made up of people who not only believe in the need for settlement, but who have, in fact, carried it out. Extreme politics for them is not a secondary avocation or an addition to their normal lives . . . but, rather, a part of their existence.<sup>8</sup>

The movement has also undertaken tactics to attract sympathizers, in Israel and abroad, among those who may not be prepared to found settlements. There have been massive rallies—generally peaceful, although several have resulted in confrontations with the police and the army. A long march to Jericho in the spring of 1976 attracted thousands of participants from all over the country and a demonstration of mothers with baby carriages near the Prime Minister's office was widely covered by domestic and foreign media. However, tensions with Arab villagers, particularly in Hebron, have led to clashes with security forces that have been less than peaceful.

Fund-raising has also become a Gush strategy. Parlor meetings with wealthy industrialists have resulted in considerable support and a corps of fund-raisers is being trained to go abroad. Part of the willingness to donate stems from sympathy with the cause, while another part comes from the satisfaction of seeing almost immediate results in the dedication and sacrifice of the Gush settlers. It is estimated that, because of its values, the Gush is able to found a community at less than ten per cent of the cost of a government settlement.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of relationships with the government, the Gush is anything but naive. The primary goal is to "close the government's options" regard-

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8. Ehud Sprinzak, "Notes on the Nature of Extremist Politics in Israel" (Hebrew) paper presented to the Eshkol Institute of the Hebrew University (May, 1976), pp. 10-11. Similar sentiments have been expressed by Avital Geva, of Mapam Kibbutz Ein Shemer, viz: "They have contributed to the State by revitalizing the conventions of our life here . . . Gush Emunim is what we once were . . ." *Hashavuah* (June 3, 1976).

9. See the statement of Israeli industrialist/financier Yisrael Shenker, cited in *The Jerusalem Post* (August 2, 1976).



ing the cession of territories in the name of peace. Such districts can be easily bartered if there are few settlers there, though they still comprise integral parts of "historic Eretz Yisrael." Yet peace must be predicated upon security, argues Rabbi Levinger, and security is not dependent upon the return of Jewish land, settled or not—for Gush sees Samaria as much a part of Israel as Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. One part of the movement's strategy is making the government understand this point, while another part is eliminating the existence of such barren territory through settlement.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the movement's leadership is most sensitive to the claim that it is a front for the National Religious Party and that its actions are, therefore, highly partisan. Gush has continually attempted to divorce itself from any partisan movements and has publicly attacked the leadership of the N.R.P. The issue, they claim, is no longer one of political discussion; rather, it involves the very existence of the State and its ideals, and has expanded far beyond the boundaries of the Gush or of any given party. Perhaps the party system, itself, is most threatened of all.

This last view is clearly reflected in the thinking of Rabbi Fried, who lashed out against the religious parties in Israel.

These religious parties are no longer spiritual. They are like merchants in the marketplace. We are open to any Jew—religious or not. We are not a partisan movement. We are a political pressure group and a spiritual movement in essence.

### ***Secular Supporters***

It seems clear that the philosophy/ideology of Gush Emunim is based upon a mutually reinforcing combination of religious faith and *realpolitik*. Any attempt to emphasize one at the expense of the other would be a gross oversimplification. Indeed, even the religious elements of its thought are actually more national or cultural. Such rhetoric has been part of the Zionist movement for a century and has often existed well outside of the religious camp, *per se*. What makes it religious here is largely a function of the commitments and affiliations of the group's membership.

Therefore, it is not difficult for largely non-religious and secular portions of the Israeli population to support one or another of the Gush activities. One can favor a harder line toward the Arab States and the occupied territories without praying three times daily. Equally, one can feel an affinity to the Land or to those who have regained the pioneering spirit without being concerned with dietary procedures.

It is not surprising, then, to find large numbers of the non-religious

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10. Levinger, et al, *Op. cit.* p. 35.

among the movement's most ardent supporters. Indeed, the issues have spread far beyond Gush Emunim claims. Many people sense that much has changed in the nature of Israeli society, which has lost, they feel, the excitement and idealistic spirit for which it was once noted. In this regard they share the Gush world view and its critique of Israeli life.

This malaise has left many without an ideology at all and has contributed to the severe depression that was evidenced in the immediate post-1973 War period. For those seeking a change from this lack of spiritualism, Gush represents a return to a simpler piety and purity which, according to some, has been consciously repressed in official institutions and structures. Any individual's personal religious piety and observance is quite beside the point when such issues are under discussion.<sup>11</sup>

In this sense, Gush has gone far to capture the public imagination in its times of greatest triumph as well as greatest despair. Pictures of uniformed soldiers standing in rapt prayer next to the Western Wall were everywhere in evidence after the 1967 War. Similarly, soldiers donning skull caps and prayer shawls next to their tanks were equally evident after the 1973 War. Whether these soldiers represented a majority or even a disproportionate minority of the Israel Defense Force is unknown. But that they struck a responsive note in the largely irreligious Israeli population—a note that religious parties have never reached—is quite clear.

For many secular supporters of the Gush it is laughable to consider their sentiments a contradiction. They are supporting a classic manifestation of Zionism, not a religious regimen. All of Zionism is based upon the "Eretz Yisrael idea," they argue, and settlement did not begin with the Gush. If not, then by what other right did their own parents venture to the Land in the various *aliyot* of the past century?<sup>12</sup>

A more crucial aspect of the movement's popularity is its territorial and diplomatic prescriptions. There appears to be wide-spread belief that the government's inability to forge a viable peace, or to issue a clear territorial policy, is a function of the leadership's inherent weakness, a factor which plagued the Rabin administration since its inception and was given a lift only by the July 4th Entebbe operation.

The movement's attempts to limit the government's options has appealed, therefore, to a broad sector of the population and, as a matter of fact, has attracted much support as the result of statements made by radical leaders on the West Bank and their representatives among Israel's Communist Knesset members, whose threats have been recently

11. This spiritual degeneration has been noted in several evaluations of Israeli life. See Leonard Fein, "The Centers of Power," in S. N. Eisenstadt, et al, eds., *Integration and Development in Israel* (New York: Praeger, 1970) pp. 51-52. Even Abba Eban grudgingly conceded to this change. See his *My Country: The Story of Modern Israel* (New York: Random House, 1972) pp. 175-183.

12. See the interviews of non-religious kibbutz members who support the movement in *The Jerusalem Post* (August 1, 1976).

punctuated by the election of a Communist Arab mayor in Nazareth (Tawfiq Ziyad), as well as by massive Arab rioting over alleged land expropriations on "Land Day," March 30, 1976.<sup>13</sup>

It is the opinion of Gush sympathizers who claim to know West Bank Arabs, that the lack of government resolution has placed these people in an unenviable position and made them subject to the "bullying" of Communist organizers.

All Arabs had expected Israel to close the borders immediately after the Six Day War and annex the West Bank. Instead, as a result of the Open Bridges, the Arabs of Israel, as well as of the West Bank, have become umbilically linked to Amman. Tomorrow, they say, Israel may return the West Bank to Jordan, so how can the Arabs there be expected to overtly display any loyalty to Israel? The only answer is settlement.<sup>14</sup>

There is a clear understanding, however, that these secular sympathizers are not totally given to every aspect of the Gush ideology. Many do not believe in the mystical tie of the People of Israel to the Land of Israel. They are pragmatic about Israel's self-interests and would be willing to trade some territories for a secure and credible peace, but since they do not believe that such a peace is an immediate likelihood, they offer support to the movement as a matter of tactics.

Others have manifested disfavor with individuals within the Gush leadership. In a world of material pragmatism, the idealist may be viewed as quaint, almost an oddity, and the very dedication which, in theory, has attracted secular supporters, has also disturbed them. In particular, ambivalence has been expressed toward Rabbi Levinger, whose bespectacled and bearded visage has been the target of merciless caricature. The question of limiting Levinger's visibility has even been raised within the movement's leadership.

Quite naturally, the most disturbing aspect of the Gush philosophy to those who are not themselves observant, is the overt religious commitment. Despite repeated assurances that its ranks are open to all, the non-religious are uncomfortable with the tenor of the movement's publicity and the behavior of those who settle under its banner. As a result, some have made their support conditional. Their sympathy will continue

so long as the issue is Eretz Yisrael—that's what we non-Orthodox have in common with them. But if they start laying down hard and fast definitions on religious, social and economic questions, many of us will most likely have to part ways with them.

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13. Zayyad, who is also a Communist member of Knesset, has stated that peace is possible only if there is "total Israeli withdrawal from the areas she has been occupying since 1967 and Israeli acceptance of the right of self-determination of the Palestinian Arab Nation, including a state of its own . . ." See the interview of Zayyad in *The Jerusalem Post* (December 19, 1975). For a report of the "Land Day" rioting, see Yosef Goell, "Shattered Illusions," *The Jerusalem Post Magazine* (April 2, 1976).

14. Moshe Kohn, "The Gush: A Tool of Politicians," *The Jerusalem Post* (August 2, 1976).

Clearly, even as the ideology of Gush Emunim is not a uni-dimensional, simplistic affair, neither is the makeup of its support.<sup>15</sup>

### ***The Gush and its Opposition***

If the followers of Gush Emunim have been vocal in their support, they have stimulated an equal virulence in those who disagree. Further, if the makeup of its ideology and of its following is complex, the nature of its opposition reflects even greater diversity. Among those who have spoken out against the movement are political and religious leaders in Israel and abroad, government and institutional administrators, kibbutz directors and a large spectrum of intellectuals throughout the country.

Since this resistance stems from many sources, it is directed at different aspects of the movement. Nevertheless, when viewed as a totality, it has come to cover much of what the Gush stands for: from religion to tactics, from ideology to politics and from mysticism to diplomacy.

The simplest argument against the Gush stems from its stance in opposition to the government and to the legitimate forces of order. On several occasions, Gush spokespeople have indicated that they do not accept the government's right to limit settlement on what they consider to be, historically, the Land of Israel. They have acted upon this belief and have forced several confrontations with the Israeli army and the police—most notably at Kadum and Hebron.

While they, almost contradictorily, express support for the Army and the police, the Gush members argue that such issues are above the law. It is this manifest disregard for official policy, in relation to what are, supposedly, the dictates of a higher law, that troubles many. In the words of a high-ranking official of the Jewish Agency (who preferred not to be identified):

We have established procedures in this country, procedures that are predicated on democracy, the rule of the majority. If you don't agree with our policies then you have to wait until the next election and choose a new government. But you cannot simply go out and act on your frustrations. If you do then you must be prepared to face the consequences.<sup>16</sup>

Other opponents have seen this trend as implying an even more dangerous threat, i.e., the breakdown of legitimacy within the nation. There is a clear recognition that waiting "until the next election" is not a satisfactory form of redress and, indeed, that the Israeli government came into being on the basis of illegal activity, e.g., illegal immigration, underground organization and gun-running. Thus, the rule of law is, at best, only weakly established and its legitimacy can easily be worn down by the gnawing effects of Gush activism.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Ibid.

16. In a similar vein, see the statement made in opposition to the Gush by Justice Minister Haim Zadok in *The Jerusalem Post* (April 4, 1976).

17. Sprinzak, *Op. cit.* p. 14.

These sentiments are echoed even by those who feel that the government ought to do more in the nature of settlement. They point to the fact that as early as July, 1967, a plan of settlement beyond the "Green Line" was introduced by then Deputy Premier Yigal Allon. Often, such settlement was carried out under government direction, while squatter groups were merely appropriating land that had already been designated for settlement. The crucial issue is whether policy is to be made in cabinet offices and the halls of the Knesset or on the street corner.

Inherent, as well, is the moral question of the right of the Israeli Government to take the lands of others by the force of arms. If, indeed, the Gush follows the writings of Rabbi Kook, then why is it not following him

in his very strong concern for other nations. Or his all-embracing concern for all aspects of life. He did not write a systematic work, so it is wrong to lift selected passages from his writings . . .<sup>18</sup>

Opponents have raised other serious questions about the true nature of Gush activity. They argue that the movement is a tool of the National Religious Party which wishes to blackmail the government for its own designs. Such feelings have been expressed even by leaders of the religious youth movement, Bnai Akiva. The fact that Gush leader Hanan Porat sits on the Bnai Akiva executive is not lost on them.<sup>19</sup>

In the minds of those who oppose the movement, comparisons and analogies are frequently drawn to destructive movements of the past. One analyst sees similarities between the slogans of the Gush and those of nationalist/religious groups in Germany of the 1930s. Much discussion has also arisen in religious circles, where analogies are traced to medieval messianism, most notably the movement of the 17th century charlatan, Shabbetai Tzvi. The Gush does a disservice to religion, they argue, by emphasizing one aspect of Judaism over all others. The path to redemption is multifaceted and *hitnahalut* is neither an exclusive nor a sufficient cause.<sup>20</sup>

Gush opponents have a telling argument when they talk of the problem of demography. To annex all the territories taken during the 1967 War would be to inherit a million and a half Arabs who, by sheer numbers, would soon be able to vote their way to Palestinian sovereignty. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that Arab families have a

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18. Zvi Yaron, interpreter of Rav Kook, cited in Moshe Kohn, "Redemption or Disaster," *The Jerusalem Post Magazine* (July 30, 1976). For an analysis of the religio/moral opposition to Gush Emunim, see David Dedein, "Genesis of an Israeli Religious Left," *New Outlook* (January, 1976): 39-42.

19. Interview with Yair Cherlow, Bnai Akiva spokesman (July, 1976).

20. The statement of Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz is typical. He argues that should the Messiah not come as a result of the *hitnahalut* movement "... these Emunim people will, like Shabbetai Tzvi and his followers, discover that they no longer have roots in this Judaism and they no longer have any interest in the continuation of this Israeli and Jewish reality. I suspect that when that happens, they will be the first to leave the country and perhaps . . . even seek refuge under the wings of another 'messiah'." *The Jerusalem Post* (August 3, 1976).

far higher birth rate than do Jewish families. On this basis alone, peopling the occupied territories is not enough. A method must be developed for governing those areas effectively in order to maintain the political integrity of the Jewish State and to gain legitimacy among its Arab residents. It might be easier to give back territories—if a meaningful peace were to follow—than to attempt a solution to this knotty problem. Gush must opt either to abandon the territories, which is unacceptable to it, or to abandon democracy, which is unacceptable to its opponents.

Finally, Gush has engendered strong opposition from religious leaders outside of Israel, some of whom have strongly condemned its activities and have called for the Israeli public as well as for the government to take swift action. British Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits has questioned the authenticity of the movement's motives and the wisdom of uniting political militancy with religious identification, and argues that such actions "may gravely weaken the attachment of our people to Judaism."<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik has questioned the precedence of territories over lives that he senses in much of Gush activity. Decisions of this type, he says, must be left to the legitimate authorities and cannot be based upon abstract religious principles, no matter how well-intentioned. Thus:

The Jewish law regarding the saving of lives must be taken into account when dealing with politics. There are now many who call for giving up not one inch of the Land of Israel, who do not feel that for intransigence we may pay a dear price in human lives . . . In matters of territories, policies and saving lives the recognized experts are the army and the Israeli Government. If they find that it is possible to give up territories, without endangering lives, then they . . . must be followed.<sup>22</sup>

### ***On Balance***

There are several insights which should be emphasized in a summary analysis of Gush Emunim. It is, first, to state that the movement is well within the mainstream of classical Zionism. *Hitnahalut*, rather than being a revolutionary discovery, is little different from the spirit of the *halutz* which was evident in all shades of Zionism during the past century. And time and again it has been argued that Israeli youth are lacking in this pioneering spirit that was common among their parents.

Perhaps much of the prior generation was far less pioneering than is generally assumed. German emigrants, for example, came to Palestine during the 1930s as a result of German terror, settled generally in urban areas and assumed middle-class life styles much like those which they had led in their native land. Similarly, Oriental immigrants were forced to

21. Quoted in *The Jerusalem Post* (August 3, 1976).

22. *Ma-ariv* [Hebrew] (September 5, 1975).



leave their homes; they came to Israel with little introduction to modern, political Zionism and much of their contact with Israeli society has led them to second-class status, at least in their own perception. The pioneering spirit was not part of their cultural baggage.

Yet even among the descendants of Second Aliyah, East Europeans—from whom the *halutz* was modelled—aspirations to materialism have often replaced those of sacrifice. The youth speak glibly of their life in “Kibbutz Tel Aviv” and sport tee-shirts proclaiming “Popeye Melech Yisrael.” It is a telling commentary that even anti-Zionist groups whose conclusions are polls apart from those of the Gush, have offered almost identical critiques of the lack of spiritual quality in modern Israeli life.

Those who oppose the Gush may well be missing the point. As supporters indicate, the issue has spread beyond the bounds of one party. Many have attacked the abject partisanship and club-house nature of Israeli politics, but Gush is among the first to stalk out on its own—disassociating itself even from the religious party which nurtured it. In this sense, the Gush may be the first and only Israeli example of a common American phenomenon: the political interest group.

Similarly, the Gush may have reinstated the legitimacy of religion as a relevant and viable social value. The position of religion in Israel has not always been elevated by the religious political parties, which are highly particularistic, internally fractionalized and often little more than sources for political patronage and largesse. To many Israelis, rabbis and ritual supervisors are political functionaries whose partisanship often overrides their religious and moral sensibilities, and who are primarily interested in placing the party faithful in positions of local influence.

It may also be that those who are offended by the messianic flavor of the movement’s approach misunderstand its appeal. While the Gush has made much of the Redemption and its affinity to the Land, its philosophy is no more naive than were other Zionist goals in the past, or than nation-building movements elsewhere. It is indicative of the distance that Israeli society has moved—from its “charismatic” beginnings to its present “rational/bureaucratic” structures (to borrow the terms of Max Weber)—that such a movement has not been simply redirected to the mainstream.

Equally, neither its leadership nor its rank-and-file members strike one as being particularly naive or mystically inclined. On the contrary, they seem to have a firm grasp on reality and have often been as attracted to the movement by its territorial and Arab policies as by its religious fervor. If being moved by a vision makes one naive, then Thomas Jefferson, Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolf Hitler, V. I. Lenin and Mao Tse-Tung must be so judged as well.

All this is not meant to be an endorsement of the movement so much as a speculation on its significance. Despite its strengths, there may well be disturbing side-effects in the Gush phenomenon. For example, the government claims a justifiable need for discretion and for freedom of

movement, necessities for an administration that has not been known for its decisive forcefulness. Might the Gush be doing a disservice by exacerbating fractionalization and by forcing confrontation for which the government may not be prepared?

Even granting that the movement's motivations are as pure as they are claimed to be, could not many of its aspirations have been achieved in less sensational a fashion? Will forcing the coalition to move rightward—now, or after the next election—do more for the cause of security, peace and Israel's lagging economy? Is the present stalemate the most fertile environment for the movement's success? These are difficult, yet nagging, questions.

Editorially, it is often amusing to watch the response that Gush has stimulated from many of its clerical supporters abroad. Orthodox American rabbis, for example, have strongly opposed the Jewish movements which have recently publicized their support for "Palestinian Rights," and they self-righteously proclaim their backing for the Israeli Government position. Yet, many of these same people also publicly state their support for Gush Emunim, whose dissent has been far more loudly condemned by Israeli leaders. Do we see here duplicity or merely a one-sided reflection of personal values? Is there a difference?

Finally, important as is territorial integrity to security, a government's credibility must be impeccable. In England, during the 30s, and recently in the United States, the lack of credibility and the effects thereof have been clearly visible. It is not unlikely that confrontations with the Gush may lead the present Israeli Government toward its own "credibility gap." The administration might not be able to carry out peace negotiations, including, perhaps, territorial concessions, without seriously damaging its strength, indeed, without its own downfall. No government can operate at that level, and the recent government crisis is a case in point.

The Gush claims that it is merely attempting to "limit the government's options," something little different from what any American pressure group might do. Though the argument may be sound, the crucial question is the ability of the political system to deal creatively with the Gush as an individual movement, with *hitnahlut* outside of the official framework and with the troubling disaffections that the movement's appeal reflects. In this sense, the movement is far more a symptom than a cause.

It is clear that the phenomenon of Gush Emunim is no simple matter—nor is its opposition. Any supposition to the contrary does an injustice to all concerned.

# *Purim: The Celebration of Dis-Order*

MONFORD HARRIS

PURIM IS OUR STRANGEST HOLIDAY.

Its name is not Jewish; it refers to the lottery cast by the enemy of the Jews. It is the one holiday that has central to it the reading of a strange scroll. The reading is done in a strange fashion. It permits the making of noise, the eruption of dis-order at specific points in the reading, and yet one must not miss a single word.

The *Scroll of Esther* is an exotic work. Its Jewish characters are strange. The heroine has two names. Esther, the one most frequently used, is probably not Hebrew. As one Talmudic sage interprets it, "The gentile nations called her 'Ist'har'." Another clarifies thus, "They called her 'Venus,' corresponding to 'Ist'har'."<sup>1</sup> Her Jewish name is Hadassah. The scroll is called the Scroll of *Esther*, not Hadassah.

So, too, Mordecai. Moderns have argued that his name is not Hebrew. The sages also betray uncertainty. They were of the opinion that he had another name, obviously Hebraic, Petaḥyah.

Esther and Mordecai, each having two names, are Diaspora Jews: one name in the gentile world; another in the Jewish world. They are hypenated Jews.

Furthermore, they are unmarried. Ahasuerus, the gentile king, is married. Haman is married and has children. Esther is without parents and without Jewish husband although she is an adult. Mordecai, too, is not a family man. This is not a Jewish situation, that the gentiles are married and the Jews are not.

There are other strange elements in the scroll. The Jewish community is an assimilated one. Esther enters a beauty contest; she marries the gentile king without telling him of her Jewishness, an act that has made Jews uncomfortable. Indeed, kabbalists were so driven to resolve this issue that they maintained that Ahasuerus actually slept with a phantom resembling Esther.

Mordecai's Jewishness is also somewhat marginal. Traditional commentators make the pointed observation that he should have spent more time in the yeshivah and less time at the royal court.

It is a luxurious life that these Jews live. They no longer have the ideal of the land of milk and honey, the pastoral ideal of the Land of Israel. *Erez*

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1. Tractate Megillah 13a; Yalkut Shimoni, *Esther*, 1053.

*Yisrael* is never even mentioned; there is only a brief reference to the exile "from Jerusalem."

We encounter a gentile world in the scroll. Even the vocabulary of the book is full of Persian words. In this gentile world there is an immense amount of drinking. The word *mishteh*, drinking party or "bash," occurs as many times here as it does in the rest of the Bible. There are many parties in the book.

These Jews are highly assimilated. They live outlandish lives, so that at first one hardly senses a Jewish community. It is absent from most of the scroll. One encounters two Jews involved with the royal court. The members of the Jewish community must each have pursued his individual career.

Just as the Land of Israel is missing from the scroll, just as the Community of Covenantal Israel is largely missing, so is God absent from the *Scroll of Esther*. His proper name is not found in the book; neither does *Elohim* occur. It has been suggested that *YHVH* is missing because the writer did not want to refer to God by name in an environment that was contaminated: drunkenness, beauty contests, assimilation.

For all its assimilation, however, it is a zealous Jewish community, fully aware of itself and, ultimately, authentic. The same Mordecai, who has instructed Esther not to reveal her origins, reveals his Jewishness which is at the root of his refusal to bow down to Haman. Furthermore, he is not an isolated, highly individualized Jew but is a member of a recognizable Jewish community.

We become aware of all this through Haman's eyes. Haman sees Mordecai not as a career man at court who happens to be Jewish, but as a member of the Jewish community:

It seemed contemptible in his eyes to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had made known to him the people of Mordecai; wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.<sup>2</sup>

Through Haman's eyes we also see the community.

There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces . . . ; their laws are diverse from those of every people; neither keep they the king's laws. . . .<sup>3</sup>

The words are a perversion of reality. The Jews are loyal. Esther has obediently become the king's wife; Mordecai has warned the king of the plot to murder him; when it comes to fighting for their lives the Jews obtain letters authorizing self-protection.

Their loyalty to the gentile state is indicated in another way. The first reference to Mordecai tells us that he "had been carried away from

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2. *Esther*, 3:6.

3. *Ibid.*, 3:8.

Jerusalem with the captives that had been carried away with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.”<sup>4</sup> It is these people who had received a letter from the prophet Jeremiah telling them, in God’s name, to “. . . seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”<sup>5</sup> There is no reason to assume that the advice was rejected.

So Haman’s words to the king are a perverse reading of Jewish reality. Its truth is that the Jews are recognizable as a distinct group. As depicted in the *Scroll of Esther* they are exilic Jews; they do many non-Jewish things; yet they remain fundamentally Jewish.

## II

Not only are Mordecai and Esther rather strange in terms of their Jewishness; not only is the Jewish community rather strange; everything about the book is strange.

The word for “law,” *dt*, occurs twenty times, yet there is much lawlessness. The king’s anger is stirred up against Vashti; he easily permits Haman to destroy the Jews; without much persuasion he permits the Jews to attack their enemies.

There are amazing reversals in the book, aside from the king’s reversal about the Jews. Vashti is rejected because modesty prevents her from attending the noblemen’s party. Yet Esther is made queen, partly because of her winning modesty. Initially, after Vashti’s refusal, the princes advise the king that “. . . this deed of the queen will come abroad unto all the women to make their husbands contemptible in their eyes . . .” and they suggest Vashti’s removal so that “. . . all the wives will give to their husbands honor . . . that every man should bear rule in his own house, and speak according to the language of his own people.”<sup>6</sup> On the one hand there is a fear of woman ruling over man, yet women do rule over men. Mordecai turns to Esther for help. Haman goes to his wife for advice. Esther manages it so that the king destroys Haman.

The king is not the ruler. He is governed by wine, women, and upstarts. He keeps reversing himself. He is a topsy-turvy king.<sup>7</sup>

## III

Jewish tradition has long been aware of the topsy-turvy quality of the *Scroll of Esther*, and there are curious traditions about it.

One old tradition is that Haman was a slave of Mordecai. During a military campaign, Mordecai had supplied a starving Haman with food

4. Ibid., 2:6.

5. *Jeremiah* 29:7.

6. *Esther* 1:17-22.

7. Tractate *Megillah* 15b. This is usually translated as “fickle-minded.”

and, in return, Haman had sold himself to Mordecai. A late traditional commentary adds:

Accordingly, Haman became a "Canaanite slave," circumcised, and therefore, obliged to fulfill the commandments that a [Jewish] woman is responsible for. If so, indeed Haman is called a Jew, for the word *Jew* is a generic term [for one who rejects idolatry].<sup>8</sup>

As bizarre as that may appear to us, the Jewish masses understood both the scroll and the festival of Purim as being topsy-turvy. They expressed it sharply: Purim is the holiday when Jews become *goyim* and *goyim* become Jews. There is a truth to this folk observation. In the scroll, gentiles do become Jews;<sup>9</sup> and, as we have noted, Jews are assimilationists.

After initially being dressed in the king's robes, Mordecai is dressed this way a second time.<sup>10</sup> Change of clothing is significant, for clothing is one of the most intimate aspects of one's personality. Rooted in this is the tradition of wearing costumes and masks on Purim. One is permitted to dress up not only like Esther or Mordecai, the former in a costume of a queen, the wife of a gentile king, the latter in a gentile king's costume, but one may dress as Haman. In the wearing of gentile clothing one becomes a gentile, if only for a little while. There is, therefore, truth to the statement that Jews become *goyim* on Purim. It happens in the scroll; it happens on the festival.

The change of clothing is involved with role reversal. Aside from gentile clothing, one is permitted to dress in the clothing of the opposite sex, something that is normally stringently forbidden. On Purim, not only do Jews become gentiles, Jewish men can become women and Jewish women can become men. The hasidic rebbe, Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta, stated that Jews enjoyed this change of clothing on Purim. He wrote:

As we see in the days of Purim: when a man changes his garments and dresses in the garments of a woman, pleasure and joy result from this. Truly, the essence of pleasure comes about because of a change of a thing to its opposite.<sup>11</sup>

This observation by a hasidic thinker is also made in the twentieth century by a student of play, Roger Caillois, who says about changes of costume that "The pleasure lies in being different or in passing for another."<sup>12</sup> Role reversal makes for pleasure.

The wearing of gentile costumes on Purim is clearly rooted in the *Scroll of Esther*. This does not seem to be the case in donning clothing of the

8. U. I. Sperling, *Taamei Ha-minhagim* (Jerusalem, n.d.), p. 376.

9. *Esther* 8:17.

10. *Ibid.*, 8:15.

11. *Ohev Israel* (Jerusalem, 1966), p. 111.

12. Quoted by Jacques Ehrmann, "Homo Ludens Revisited," in *Game, Play, Literature* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 37.



opposite sex. We believe, however, that it is an important aspect of the Purim celebration.

To understand this we must reflect on Biblical modes of thought. From the standpoint of the Bible,

The drama of man under God cannot unfold without the continuous existence of the mankind that is supposed to live in accordance with the Instructions (*torot*). Man, therefore, with the accent on his reproductive capacity, is the second major concern of the Israelite historians. Mankind is conceived as a clan deriving its community bond from a common ancestor. History, under this aspect, becomes an account of the generations (*toldot*). The symbol of the *toldot* applies to the whole course of Israelite history.”<sup>13</sup>

A startling exception to this is the *Scroll of Esther*, and medieval Jews were aware of it. *Sefer Hasidim*, the medieval Jewish book of the devout, reflected on this issue. Commenting on the opening phrase of Genesis 5, “This is the book of the generations . . .” it says,

. . . a (Biblical) book that is not concerned with the generations (*toldot*) of Israel, does not (therefore) contain the Divine name (YHWH). For example, the *Scroll of Esther*. Because Ahasuerus, who was a gentile, took her to wife . . . and the book is about a gentile cohabiting with an Israelite woman, the (Divine) name is unknown to the *Scroll of Esther*.<sup>14</sup>

History, *toldot*, is missing from *Esther*.

That is why Jews in Eastern Europe, at least, donned the clothing of the opposite sex. They enacted, thereby the denial of *toldot*, for Esther and Mordecai were without family. The man who wears woman’s clothing and the woman who wears man’s clothing exchange social and, by implication, biological roles, but incomplete biological roles. The man stops being man; the woman stops being woman. There can be, therefore, no family. The seriousness of this is obvious once we know, in the words of Erwin Straus, that “by means of the family the individual stands in relation to history.”<sup>15</sup>

So, too, drunkenness. According to the tradition, “It is the duty of a man to mellow himself on Purim until he cannot tell the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordecai’ ”<sup>16</sup> As we have indicated, there is much drinking in the book, and drinking is urged in the tradition. That one not be able to tell the difference between blessing and cursing, that one become tipsy, is part of the Purim festival which is rooted in the text.

Drunken people are disoriented; their world becomes topsy-turvy; they fall. And it is not accidental that the verb “to fall” occurs quite a

13. Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. I: *Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), pp. 165-6.

14. J. Wistinetzki and J. Freiman, *Sefer Hasidim* (Berlin, 1924), paragraph 703.

15. *The Primary World of the Senses* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1963), p. 326.

16. Tractate *Megillah*, p. 7b.

number of times in the scroll. For the drunken, falling man encounters the world as topsy-turvy, as dis-ordered.

Another curious Purim custom is worthy of note. There seems to have been a practice, in Eastern Europe, of snatching food from one another and hitting one another on the holiday. The legal codes are of the opinion that these actions do not constitute a violation of the prohibitions against stealing and assault.<sup>17</sup> Strange as it may seem, such actions are rooted in the scroll. They, too, serve to structure the holiday as topsy-turvy.

The *Scroll of Esther* is a carefully written work, hinting at more than it says explicitly. Of importance is Mordecai's genealogy: he is the son of Jair, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite. Haman's genealogy is also important: he is the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite. We are to remember that King Saul had been ordered by God, through Samuel, to destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions. Saul captured Agag, their king, spared him and all their best things.<sup>18</sup> Chapter nine of the *Scroll of Esther* says three times that, when the Jews of Persia fought back, "on the spoil they laid not their hand."

Now Mordecai is related to Saul, Haman to Agag. In the Saul-Agag conflict the children of Israel do take of the spoil. In the Mordecai-Haman conflict the Jews do not take the spoil.

But, traditionally, Jews not only dress in the clothing of the opposite sex, denying *toldot*, not only do they curse Mordecai and so deny their Jewishness, they also stretch forth their hands to the possessions of Jews. Purim is a topsy-turvy festival. Some people even doubted that it was a festival; for there is a Jewish folk expression that with its mockery gets at something true: "Purim is no festival and fever is no sickness."<sup>19</sup>

#### IV

Purim is play time in Jewish tradition. It has an important function.

Play has been studied by many thinkers down the ages. For our purpose, the words of Nietzsche serve to interpret the meaning of Purim as play time. He wrote, "I know of no other way of coping with great tasks, than play."<sup>20</sup> This is what Purim accomplishes; it enables the Jew to cope with a great task: coming to grips with exile.

One of the students of play in our time, the phenomenological philosopher, Eugene Fink, discusses play and the player:

Here we find a quite peculiar "schizophrenia," a kind of split personality that is not to be mistaken for a manifestation of mental illness. The player

17. For a summary of the legal material, cf. J.D. Epstein, *Ozar Haiggeret* (New York, 1968), pp. 104-106.

18. 2 *Samuel* 15:9.

19. Cf. R. Alcalay, *Words of the Wise* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 395.

20. Quoted by E. Fink, "The Oasis of Happiness," tr. and abridged by U. & T. Saine, in J. Ehrmann, ed., *Game, Play, Literature*, p. 25.

who participates in a game executes in the real world an action of a familiar type. Within the context of the internal meaning of play, however, he is taking over a role. Here we must distinguish between the real man who "plays" and the man created by the role within the play. The player hides his real self behind his role and is submerged in it. He lives *in* his role with a singular intensity, and yet not like the schizophrenic who is unable to distinguish between "reality" and "illusion." The player can recall himself from his role; while playing, man retains a knowledge of his double existence, however greatly reduced this knowledge may be. Man exists in two spheres simultaneously, not for lack of concentration or out of forgetfulness but because the double personality is essential to play.<sup>21</sup>

Purim is playing exile. This is the reality which we play at Purim. This is the only time, the only festival, that Judaism has structured for dealing with exile. While the three pilgrimage festivals deal with history, they do not deal with exile. Neither do the High Holidays. The liturgies of these five holidays have reference to exile but their concern is not exile. The 9th Day of Ab deals with the destruction of the Temples but does not deal with exile. Neither does Hanukkah. Since Judaism's arena is the arena of history, and exile is an aspect of Jewish existence, Judaism must deal with it. Exile must be grasped existentially. Purim does that. It is the enacting of exile.

Eugene Fink was, of course, not thinking of Purim, but we who think of it are startled by his references to a "quite peculiar 'schizophrenia,' a kind of split personality that is not to be mistaken for a manifestation of mental illness." This is so because the player of the role can distinguish between the real and the illusory, can recall himself from his role.

This is true of the Jew on Purim who dons the clothing of the opposite sex, who becomes mellow with drink and curses and blesses the wrong persons, who, in eating hamantaschen, or dressing like Haman, assimilates something of him, who wears the gentile clothing worn by a Mordecai or Esther.

While playing these roles, the Jew retains a knowledge of his double existence, a Jew in exile: a Mordecai-Petahyah, an Esther-Hadassah. If "double personality is essential to play," Purim, rich in double personalities (even Haman can be interpreted as Mordecai's Jew) is, in essence, play.

Two basic elements make up Purim, dis-order and merriment. They are intimately interrelated. The response to dis-order, which is life in exile, is merriment. It need not have been that way. There is the fast of Esther which is a prelude to Purim but it is not Purim. Fasts are serious but Purim is fun time. There were other possibilities. Purim could have been a pleasant festival and stressed the serious, somewhat like Shavuot. Yet Purim stresses the comic.

Rightly so. "The comic frame should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting*. Its ultimate would not be *passiveness* but *maximum*

21. Ibid., p. 23.

consciousness. One would transcend himself by noting his own foibles.”<sup>22</sup> This observation by Kenneth Burke, the literary critic, is suggestive partly of Fink’s observation, but also says more. For Burke also grapples with the problem of history. He writes:

The comic frame . . . might mitigate somewhat the difficulties in engineering a shift to new symbols of authority, as required by the new social relationships that the revolutions of historic environment have made necessary. It might provide important cues for the composition of one’s life, which demands accomodation to the structure of others’ lives.<sup>23</sup>

*Esther* depicts a Jewish community in exile, “facing difficulties in engineering a shift to new symbols of authority”; they no longer live in Erez Yisrael; they no longer are an autonomous community. There are new social relationships made necessary by a revolution of their historic environment. They must accomodate themselves to other, that is, gentile, lives.

So Purim’s comic frame is important. But there also is, as we have indicated, dis-order. All the Purim activities that make for dis-order are, in essence, deviations from the norm, otherwise prohibited, but sanctioned on Purim.

Sanctioned deviations have been looked at and analyzed by many social scientists, and of particular interest is James Faris’ study of a Newfoundland community, Cat Harbour.<sup>24</sup> It need hardly be said that 20th century Cat Harbour is as radically different from the community of covenantal Israel during the last twenty centuries as can be imagined. Nevertheless, from this study of Cat Harbour we can learn something about Purim.

In certain situations in Cat Harbour, “occasions,” in their vocabulary, “it would appear that behaviour obtaining at these occasions is topsy-turvy and totally different from what one might expect.”<sup>25</sup> The occasions that interest us are the “times,” situations of “social ‘license’ often obtaining at weddings, Christmas parties and ‘scoffs’.” A “time is a situation where the deviations and the role ‘reversal’ sanctioned by the occasion are fully achieved.”<sup>26</sup> Otherwise, they are sins. So, too, the Purim situation. The topsy-turvy things that Jews do on Purim are sanctioned by the occasion; otherwise, they would be regarded as sins.

Drinking at Cat Harbour is of interest. “Men who otherwise seldom drink are often intoxicated at weddings, an expected and sanctioned deviation, a role reversal, as it were, from the rigidly temperate facade

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22. Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (New York: New Republic, 1937), Vol. I, p. 220.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

24. James Faris, *Cat Harbour: A Newfoundland Fishing Settlement*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies, No. 3, 1966 (Cambridge: U. of Cambridge Press, 1966).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

normally maintained.”<sup>27</sup> This is why Purim drinking is important. It is an aspect of role reversal which leads to disorientation.

A characteristic of Christmastide are the Mummers, “the disguised individuals who go from house to house and who, in the disguise, often engage in activities considered a complete breach in normal circumstances.”<sup>28</sup> Faris adds, “. . . the behaviour which is regarded appropriate in these deviant circumstances, the behaviour in which the Mummers engage is conceptually associated with strangers, the representatives of the evil and potentially dangerous outside world.”<sup>29</sup>

This is true of Purim. The role reversal in Purim is associated with gentiles. Gentiles are drinkers; Mordecai and Esther wear gentile robes. Wearing the clothes of the opposite sex, Jews opt out of *toldot*, and become *goyim*, strangers, representatives of the dangerous outside world.

A third “time” in Cat Harbour is the “scoff,” when a few married couples get together and have a party. Games are played; the men drink; there is sexual joking and license. The food for a “scoff” is “bucked,” it is taken from someone else’s garden or cellar.

Now the license of a “scoff” is not found in Purim. There is no sexual license. Yet the wearing of clothes of the opposite sex is a kind of promiscuity, for it is a kind of confusion and mixture and this is promiscuity.<sup>30</sup> The important common element in the Cat Harbour “scoff” and in Purim is the “bucking” which we have seen as a legitimate enterprise on Purim, although some of the pious were ill at ease with it.<sup>31</sup>

Faris sums up his analysis of “times” by reasserting the following. “In the role reversal of the ‘times’ people define their conception of what is ‘reverse’ by the most deviant category known to them, the symbols and beliefs and behaviors they regard as characterizing the stranger.”<sup>32</sup> We believe that this is true of Purim. The whole range of things that characterize Purim are aspects of the most deviant category that the Jews know, namely, the *goy*.

Now,

Cat Harbour was originally settled in a harsh and demanding environment for pressing social reasons. These threatening circumstances gave rise to and helped reinforce, a stereotype of the representative of the “other world”; the potentially dangerous “stranger,” the hostile outsider.<sup>33</sup>

The Jewish exilic environment is harsh and demanding. The threatening historic situations do reinforce stereotypes of the dangerous stranger. Purim’s role reversals, all of them, are the reversals of the hostile stranger.

27. Ibid., p. 204. A wedding is distinguished from a marriage, the latter being the religious service.

28. Ibid., p. 206.

29. Ibid., p. 207.

30. E. Partridge, *Origins* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 528.

31. Cf. Isaiah Hurwitz, *The Two Tablets of the Covenant* (Tel Aviv, 1959), Vol. 2, p. 48 (Hebrew).

32. Faris, *Op. cit.*, p. 210.

33. Ibid., p. 211.

## VI

There is a tradition that, at the coming of the Messiah, all the holidays will be revoked, but the “days of Purim” will remain in effect.<sup>34</sup> Many of the commentators were baffled by the distinction. Purim is, in the technical sense, not a holiday. It is referred to as the “days of Purim.” But the tradition that Purim will not be revoked is rooted in a sure grasp of what Purim is.

The days of Purim are a necessity in the time of the Messiah. An observation of Elijah Ha-Cohen, author of the compendium, *Midrash Talpiot*, will help us to understand the tradition of Purim’s continuation. He said that,

Only in the days of the Messiah, after the wars have been settled, will the light of Torah begin to shine. Israel will then be secure, will recount the events of history, what happened to them in exile. (They will do this), so as to give praise and thanks to the Holy One, Blessed be He, for out of the dust heaps has He raised the poor.<sup>35</sup>

In the days of the Messiah, Israel will talk about what happened before peace was established, what happened in exile, the dis-order in Jewish existence. For to know, existentially, the new order in history, the order established by the Messiah, one must be aware of the dis-order of former days, the dis-order of exile, the topsy-turvy world. Therefore, Purim will not pass away; the celebration of dis-order will not be revoked. Only through the occasion of dis-order can we *know* order.

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34. For the sources, see Y. T. Livinsky, *Sefer Ha-moadim* (Tel Aviv, 1963), Vol. 6, p. 30.

35. *Midrash Talpiot* (Czernowitz, 1860), p. 141.



# *Freedom and Slavery in the Fiction of Isaac Bashevis Singer*

NILI WACHTEL

## I

THE PURSUIT OF FREEDOM IS THE CENTRAL experience of the modern world. Emerging from the Middle Ages, man sought the freedom to shape his own destiny as an individual. Intoxicated with self-sufficiency, he entered the 19th century, but by the time that century was over he had replaced the old authorities and institutions with new ones, becoming as enslaved to the new as he had been to the old. This is essentially the experience to which Singer's work addresses itself.

Singer begins by disposing of freedom as an end in itself. Man may strive for freedom, he may even attain it—but he quickly discovers that his freedom is empty and that he is ever on the verge of surrendering his life to the promise of some new meaning. In a recent conversation,<sup>1</sup> Singer described such a state as “a state of nothingness,” something that happens “when one leaves one's faith and can find nothing else,” and, he added: “It's a terrible state!”

Singer portrays men who are between faiths. Having freed themselves from the bonds of God and community, they have also freed themselves from their very identities. With their God and their community, they knew who they were and what they were expected to do; now they know nothing as certain. They are disoriented, ambivalent; they feel a sense of inner fragmentation. With neither past nor future, they live in a disconnected present. They are utterly undefined, unset; they float. Unable to act decisively with their whole being, they are shadows, not men, with no convictions or attachments, with only an awareness of the absurdity of their condition. A recent example, Herman Broder of *Enemies, A Love Story*, is described as “hiding,” hiding to escape responsibility for his life. With his uncertain occupation, his uncertain marriage, and his uncertain religion, Herman pledges again and again to seek the coherence of Jewish life. Not subject to any authority, at the mercy of caprice, he does not know where his duty lies; he spends his days alone, bored, brooding. Like an automobile that he sees on one snowy morning

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1. “Isaac Bashevis Singer on Modern Times: An Interview” with Nili Wachtel, *The Jewish Spectator* 40 (Spring 1975): 19-24.

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vainly straining to climb out of the slush—Herman's wheels spin helplessly in one spot.

Herman Broder is, in every way, a typical, modern existentialist "hero" who, in attempting to assert his freedom, to control and direct his life, becomes overwhelmed, instead, with the purposelessness of his existence. Believing that there is no meaning except what he alone creates, he discovers that, alone, his existence *has* no meaning. Alone, he is a stranger in the universe, utterly superfluous; he is cut off, alienated, from the universe—his freedom, as Sartre's hero, Mathieu, discovers, is exile.<sup>2</sup>

Now, it has long been fashionable to point to the Jew as the perfect symbol for this condition of exile and alienation. Perpetual exile and a ghetto-existence on the fringe of society were supposed to reflect perfectly this being in the world without belonging to it. Singer, however—and he is certainly not alone—sees the true experience of alienation and exile not in the ghetto Jew, but in the emancipated and enlightened Jew. Within his ghetto, as Singer portrays him, the Jew belonged. He enjoyed a highly integrated and coherent life; he was bound to his God and his community by the firmest of ties and his identity was whole. It was only after the Emancipation and the Enlightenment came along—those twin processes which purported to free the Jew from the restraints of his medieval life, processes which Singer describes as the new dish of kasha that Satan had cooked up for the Jews<sup>3</sup>—that the Jew was sent out to dangle uncertainly in the modern world. In that sense, Singer argues, the freedoms of the Emancipation and the Enlightenment were, in many ways, neither emancipating nor enlightening.

Ezriel Babad, for example, of *The Manor* and *The Estate*, abandons the closed cohesive world of the old Jewish *shtetl* in order to taste the freedom of modern Warsaw. He finds Jews in all of the best circles of that city's intelligentsia, but their modernity and their sophistication cannot hide their Jewish past. They punctuate discussions of Kant and Hegel with a jabbing Talmudic finger, and they clutch at their beards which they have already shaved; they kiss ladies' hands with a fervor once reserved for ritual garments. Ezriel himself, now a student of medicine, prepares his assignments while humming ancient prayers. He attends elegant dinners and finds the complex etiquette of the dinner table as perplexing as the *Shulhan Arukh*. He is increasingly torn by doubts: he has abandoned the old traditions, but he is faced with modern rules and regulations; he has forsaken God, but he is dependent on all sorts of beaurocrats. He knows that he has made a mistake, but he knows neither what it is nor how to

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2. He says, "I am nothing; I possess nothing. . . . Outside the world, outside the past, outside myself; freedom is exile . . ." (J-P. Sartre, *The Reprieve* [New York: Vintage Books, 1973], p. 363).

3. "The Last Demon," *Short Friday and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1964), p. 122.

rectify it. The emptiness and purposelessness of his freedom now begin to plague him: "Why am I living? What am I doing here? What is my mission? What is my duty? . . . Or does man not have any duty? Is he simply a cow that needs to graze until he dies or is killed?"<sup>4</sup> Significantly, Singer has Ezriel specialize in psychoanalysis—a fitting discipline, he seems to say, for a generation that feels itself beset with schizophrenia. And it is finally through Ezriel, the specialist in "nervous diseases and mental ailments," that Singer gives voice to what it is that ails modern man. Alone, independent, free of any single influence or direction, modern man becomes aware of a chaotic world alive within him, a churning chaos of conflicting drives and ambitions that Singer usually reserves for his demonic fiction:<sup>5</sup>

[Ezriel's] brain was a little insane asylum of its own. . . . When he listened to the voice of his own spirit, it seemed to him that he heard the cry of all the generations. He recognized the voices of his own parents and grandparents within himself. At times it seemed to him that he heard even more ancient voices, the idolatrous ones of pagan ancestors. Existence had always meant the same chaos; the ego had always wanted everything for itself—money, fame, sex, knowledge, power, immortality. But this savage was constantly coming up against the resistance of the world with its restrictions and taboos. Was it any wonder that people went mad? How much strain could the mental mechanism stand?<sup>6</sup>

The problematic nature of modern freedom as presented through Ezriel Babad is not limited to Jews. Modern European society, the society into which the Jews are released, is itself trapped between two ages and two modes of life; it suffers its own schizophrenia and its own crisis of identity. But with *The Family Moskat* and with Asa Heshel Bannet certain aspects of the problem which are more uniquely Jewish come to the foreground. When Asa Heshel comes to Warsaw, all he wants to do is study. As a result of the intellectual freedom of modern times, the traditional Jewish devotion to the sacred texts becomes an infatuation with secular knowledge. Asa Heshel and his generation cannot read enough. They read novels, plays, essays; they read mathematics, physics, history, philosophy. They read every author whose work they can obtain. They pore over their texts as their Orthodox fathers pored over Torah and Talmud. But what all this secular learning accomplishes, Singer shows, is to wean the Jews away from their traditional sources, the sources that had

4. *The Estate* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), p. 216.

5. During our conversation Singer gave me a less demonic version: "My father did not need to wonder at every moment what he must do. He knew that he would get up every morning and recite his prayers; he knew that he would always fulfill the commandments, always give to charity. My father's notions of good and evil were clear-cut: he knew exactly what was good and what was evil. But I, I get up every morning with millions of choices. I have many temptations. My notions of good and evil are not so clear. In other words, for all the freedoms that we have taken for ourselves in modern times we are paying with this chaos." (Wachtel, *The Jewish Spectator*, p. 19).

6. *The Manor* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967), p. 394.

held them together as a religion and a people and had given them their identity.

In *The Family Moskat* Singer shows how the traditional Jewish family—and, by extension, the family of Israel—disintegrates under the impact of modern education. The Moskat family begins its existence as a cohesive, intact unit with a single outlook. But as the rich and varied possibilities of the modern world begin to beckon, the initial familial unit gives way to a group of individuals, scattered all over the world, speaking every conceivable language, espousing every conceivable idea, hardly thinking of themselves as belonging to the same family. And, in the midst of them all—Asa Heshel. His wife looks at him, exhausted and spent as he is with his incessant reading, fretting over his inability to reconcile contradicting theories and systems, increasingly skeptical of all of his worldly knowledge—and suddenly she knows why he is so tortured:

He was not a worldly man by his very essence. He was one of those who must serve God or die. He had forsaken God, and because of this he was dead—a living body with a dead soul. She was astonished that this simple truth had eluded her until now.<sup>7</sup>

Elsewhere, Singer writes: “A people that for four thousand years had lived with God and divine ideals has completely forgotten itself . . .”<sup>8</sup> For Asa Heshel, freedom is stifling. His existence is “grey,” he is surrounded by “extinguished souls” among whom “it is impossible to breathe.” Modern Warsaw is a scene of frivolity and despair. Her emancipated and enlightened Jews, attached to nothing, committed to nothing, travel here and there, give and attend parties, live for pleasures of the moment—but at the heart of all the merrymaking is a sense of futility and doom. In the best Ecclesiastes manner, Singer’s modern Warsaw attests to the unaging vanity of all man’s efforts to impose a meaning on his existence. That this is so is not an accident. Singer considers Ecclesiastes his favorite Biblical author, and it is not surprising that he should describe the jaded glitter of modern Warsaw in terms that bring Ecclesiastes to mind. Warsaw’s Jews also set out to discover the world and its treasures, only to find all of those early promises empty, so they lapse into a position which suspects and negates everything, and see vanity and folly everywhere. They are uncertainly poised between a past that they had already rejected and a future that they no longer want. They are, in other words, walking a tightrope.

This most exquisite metaphor for the state of their precariousness is presented in *The Magician of Lublin* and Yasha Mazur is the tightrope walker par excellence. Yasha, a magician, a performer on the tightrope, a chameleon of many colors and shapes, values his freedom. He is afraid to be fixed by a single and permanent identity. He shuttles between Lublin and Warsaw, but he feels at home in neither. He leads a busy life, he

7. *The Family Moskat* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965), p. 582.

8. *The Estate*, p. 362.

juggles all of his activities and affairs and keeps some sort of balance on his tightrope, but he feels no contentment; full of a thousand possibilities and potentials, his life is empty. He has no peace, he feels himself dangling; he is walking his tightrope, he feels, but always on the verge of disaster.

The tightrope appears and reappears in Singer's work with regularity, and in changing guises. In his autobiographical *In My Father's Court* it is a balcony attached to his father's sacred Bet Din and overlooking Warsaw's very profane Krochmalna Street. In his well-known story, "The Spinoza of Market Street" it is a garret-room suspended between an orderly heaven above and a chaotic marketplace below. For the heroine of "The Mirror" it is a mirror standing between her native *shtetl* Krashnik and wicked, modern Sodom. For Yasha Mazur, as the case in point, it is a tightrope stretching between the synagogue and the street. Yasha passes by a synagogue and pauses at the open door. There he inhales a mixture of tallow and wax and something musty, something remembered from his youth. A long forgotten feeling sweeps over him, a feeling of once having belonged somewhere. These are my roots, he says to himself; I must be a Jew, he promises himself, a Jew like all the others. He walks out into the crowded sun-drenched street, and it seems to him that the street and the synagogue deny each other: if one is true, the other is false. But which is true and which false? The piety that enveloped him before now cools and evaporates. Can he really give up his books and his papers, his stylish clothes, his women? The vows that he made in the synagogue now seem excessive, like words whispered in a moment of passion. All of his doubts return.

Walking the tightrope is charting an unsteady course between two alternative slaveries, trying to steer clear of both. As Singer said of his brother, the noted author, Israel Joshua Singer: "It was hard to know exactly where he stood. Although opposed to piety, he was aware of the faults of worldly existence. . . . Inclined toward socialism, he was at the same time too skeptical to have that much faith in humanity."<sup>9</sup> As their father succinctly put it: "Neither this world nor the world to come." Walking the tightrope means living outside of everything; it means being anchored in nothing more substantial than one's own isolated, "free" and very precarious self. Of the girl in the mirror Singer said: "She is neither in Sodom nor in Krashnik . . . she remains suspended between two worlds. . . . In other words, she becomes completely isolated. It's a way of dying."<sup>10</sup>

In an abrupt and surprising epilogue Yasha Mazur abandons his tightrope and encloses himself in a doorless, brick cell. He grows a beard and sidelocks, puts on a wide fringed garment, a long gaberdine, and a velvet skullcap, and he spends days and nights studying Torah. The

9. *In My Father's Court* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), p. 232.

10. "I Keep Making Plans as if I Would Live Forever," *The New York Times*, August 19, 1973, Section II, pp. 1, 4. An interview with Irving Howe on Yale's radio station following production of the play "The Mirror." Reprinted as "Yiddish Tradition vs. Jewish Tradition: A Dialogue" in *Midstream*, 19 (June/July 1973): 33-38.

epilogue—which parallels Ecclesiastes' own abrupt farewell to the world and its pleasures with "in sum, having heard everything, fear God and keep His commandments for this is man's whole duty"—represents Yasha's recognition that his freedom was not freedom but a living death. "Why did you do it? Why?" asks a friend visiting the cell. And Yasha answers: "I could no longer breathe."<sup>11</sup> If the tightrope is Singer's metaphor for the precariousness of freedom, the brick cell is his metaphor for the security of slavery. Not that the security is total; even within his cell Yasha's doubts continue. But now he is anchored in something, his cell is meant to stand for a certain context within which he lives, a framework which shapes his life. His self-enclosure in the cell is an act of self-limitation, a recognition that he is not self-sufficient. In his Jewish cell Yasha feels free.

## II

The question that naturally arises from such an ending is the following: is Singer suggesting that modern Jews abandon their freedom and return to the past and to Orthodoxy? But this question, which will be taken up later, is not the significant one about *The Magician of Lublin*. What is significant here is, first of all, that Yasha can get off of his tightrope of freedom only through some sort of slavery; and, secondly, that he does what he does not only because he has come to dread his freedom, but, also, because he fears that he might surrender his freedom to some satanic force from which he might never extricate himself. As the book repeats and repeats: Yasha was walking his tightrope, always on the brink of disaster.

In an article written for *Commentary* a number of years ago, Robert Alter describes the great spiritual temptation that exists for modern man to "surrender [his] precarious identity to an elite group or cultural milieu, a charismatic leader, a proximate social class, or, above all, to some ideological fundamentalism; and Jews since the beginning of the Emancipation," Alter adds, "have provided abundant and painful examples of the various strategies of surrender."<sup>12</sup>

Those who found their new identities in the modern world had succumbed, in one way or another, to the seduction of modern rationalism. Underlying the secular ideologies of the modern world was the Enlightenment's assurance that, if only reason were allowed to rule, national and religious differences would melt away and a new and universal Man would emerge as master of creation. Among Enlightened Jews, rationalism and the mystique of progress that went with it assumed something of the old messianic faith.

11. *The Magician of Lublin* (New York: Noonday Press, 1960), p. 236.

12. Robert Alter, "Emancipation, Enlightenment & All That," *Commentary*, 53 (February 1972): 65.

What Singer shows is that the result was not enlightenment or progress, but slavery to human misconception. At issue here is Singer's dualistic perception of reality. As he sees it, reality is fundamentally paradoxical. It does not meet man with a series of neatly separated alternatives, but with a blend in which the contraries exist together. Man, likewise, is a paradox. He dwells a little lower than the angels and a little higher than the beasts; both aspects of his nature, inextricably intertwined, are at war with each other, and only both together constitute truth. Against the customary assumption of man as a unit, a single united being who, when he acts, marshalls all of his energies in a single united direction, Singer posits men who are torn between two opposing directions, whose appearance suggests two halves glued together, as if "the contrary traits have no harmony."<sup>13</sup> And while the Enlightenment extolled its rational man, minimizing or altogether ignoring the non-rational aspect of his nature, Singer labors to show that man does not live by his reason alone.

Over the years he has evolved a steadily expanding gallery of aging—and often hilarious—Jewish scholars who, having discarded religious traditions and formulations, spend their lives inventing rational equivalents and substitutes. Singer's scholars—an assortment of "Doctors" and "Professors"—operate from musty libraries and studies cluttered with dusty manuscripts, unopened letters, and bulging wastepaper baskets. The walls are covered, floor to ceiling, with bookshelves; the overflow is packed away in closets and in trunks, in attics and in cellars. The Doctors and Professors are perpetually engaged in composing dissertations which ferret out rational truths "valid for all times." Perhaps best known of these theoreticians of rational religions is Dr. Fischelson—"The Spinoza of Market Street." Dr. Fischelson studies Spinoza's *Ethics* the way his father had studied the Talmud. He knows by heart every proposition, every proof, every corollary, and yet he studies the *Ethics* for hours every day, with a magnifying glass, murmuring and nodding his head in agreement. Reason is the ruling principle of Dr. Fischelson's life. He lives high up in his room studying Spinoza by day, contemplating heaven at night, wishing to live his life *sub specie eternitatis*—and completely detached from the teeming life of the Jewish street below. But the world is not rational, it is thoroughly unSpinozan. It presents itself to Dr. Fischelson with an immediacy that no amount of theorizing can dispel; he suffers from ulcers, his room is oppressively hot in the summertime, a world war explodes and cuts off his meager pension. Human existence, Singer argues, cannot be coerced into an all-rational mold. Dr. Fischelson's rational truths are half-truths; to work, they would need to incorporate—to marry, if Singer's symbolism is borrowed—the realities of the street. This is what Dr. Fischelson learns when he unexpectedly marries Black Dobbe, a lady of the Jewish street. In his one concrete, complete experi-

13. "The Son," *A Friend of Kafka and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), p. 250.



ence Dr. Fischelson embraces his new bride in the marital bed, and he drops Spinoza to the floor.

But Dr. Fischelson is the exception. Singer's other "Doctors" and "Professors" remain tucked away in their dusty towers, churning out theories on top of theories, more and more enslaved to their illusions—until reality slaps them in their faces. In fact, it might be said that this is the central burden of much of Singer's work, certainly of his historical works: that life and history make a mockery of the simplistic abstractions generated by men. Man a rational creature? "Europe is full of plans," observes Ezriel Babad, "but all of them demand human sacrifice."<sup>14</sup> The rational concept of universal Man also proved to be an abstraction; in historical reality man appears in groups. Those who wished to live, like Dr. Fischelson, *sub specie eternitatis*, under some universal understanding of history,<sup>15</sup> like another scholar, Dr. Eibeschutz, were once again rudely reminded that they were Jews. When the Jews entered modern European history, they entered not in their new role as "men," but in their old pre-rational role as aliens and as victims. "I have a feeling," Asa Heshel warns, "that all of humanity is caught in a trap. No going forward and no going backward. We Jews will be the first victims."<sup>16</sup> At the end of *The Family Moskat*, the family mansion—European Jewry—lies in fiery ruin: the end of all illusions and vain hopes.

Singer's thesis is—to repeat—that, left on his own, man succumbs to some simplistic misconception; that, while he deludes himself that he is self-sufficient, man plunges into deeper and deeper slavery. *The Family Moskat* demonstrates this thesis better, perhaps, than Singer's other historical novels. It presents a richly-detailed panorama of the ideologies and movements that animated turn-of-the-century Warsaw. Contributing to the feverish atmosphere even more than the theoreticians are those who carry theory into practice. Modern Warsaw swarmed with radicals and revolutionaries. Anarchists, socialists, Bundists, communists, all roamed the streets engaged in what was, to Singer, hysterical activism. With them, the silent contemplation of some far-off heavenly harmony became an apocalyptic campaign for utopia on earth. It is they, the secular messiahs of the modern world, who finally demonstrated, not the rationality, but the diabolic irrationality, of human life and history.

The messianic tradition in Judaism, and especially the tradition of false messianism, has long fascinated Singer. In an interview with Irving

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14. *The Estate*, p. 363.

15. Dr. Eibeschutz, who had labored all his life to devise some "Newtonian formula of history," is attacked one day by hoodlums for no other reason than that he is Jewish. "Sooner or later you have to feel everything on your own skin," he concedes. "Such is history, and that is what I have occupied myself with all these years." ("Pigeons," *A Friend of Kafka and Other Stories*, p. 120).

16. *The Family Moskat*, p. 527.

Howe,<sup>17</sup> he was asked to explain this fascination with—as it was put to him by his interviewer—“the tradition of Sabbatai Zevi, which leads people to fanaticism, to hysteria, to disintegration, to explosion.” And Singer obliged:

To me, Sabbatai Zevi is the symbol of the man who tries to do good and comes out bad. In other words, for me Sabbatai Zevi is in a way Stalin and all these people who tried so hard to create a better world and who ended up by creating the greatest misery.

Referring to Warsaw's secular messiahs, Singer added:

All these illusions and all these vain hopes. I compared them to the people who believed in Sabbatai Zevi. They were just as honest in their own way, just as zealous, and just as disappointed.

And so, to tell the straightforward story of this century's redemptive delusion, Singer presented to his readers *The Family Moskat*. But to provide a profound insight into the perennial human drive “to create a better world,” he reached back into the 17th century and, in *Satan in Goray*, he resurrected Sabbatai Zevi.

Goray, as Singer describes it, is a little Jewish town at the end of the world, always isolated from the world. The year is 1666, according to mystical calculations The Year of Redemption, and Goray is alive with apocalyptic expectancy: the Messiah is coming, the Exile is at an end. Meanwhile, two emissaries arrive to give more precise form to the coming redemption. The first, Reb Mates, a salesman of holy scripts and amulets, is utterly other-worldly, utterly devoted to the spirit. The second, Reb Gedaliya, the new ritual slaughterer, is all worldliness, utterly devoted to the flesh. The two emissaries, representing opposite poles, demonstrate what is fundamentally wrong with man's messianic impulse. Unwilling to endure the contradictions and uncertainties of human life, he strives for perfect and complete and final solutions. But this striving breaks open the dualistic center and sends him to extremes. Seizing upon some simplistic one-sided solution to the complex problem of human existence, he proceeds to follow it to its outer limit, becoming all the more enslaved to his distorted vision. Mates removes himself from the world and from life, as if striving to become a soul that needs no body. Gedaliya, on the other hand, devotes himself only to the world and only to physical life, becoming, in the end, a body that has no soul.

Of the two, it is Gedaliya who wins Goray's following and, during his reign, moral anarchy triumphs. Gedaliya, it would seem, came to Goray the way the Enlightenment came to the Jews. He sees salvation in worldliness, in humanism, in liberalism. He puts Goray on a diet of meat and materialism, he abolishes all the old thou-shalt-nots and, for the sake of

17. “I Keep Making Plans as if I Would Live Forever,” *The New York Times*, reprinted as “Yiddish Tradition vs. Jewish Tradition: A Dialogue” in *Midstream*.

the coming salvation, everything is permitted. Not only do his reforms deform Goray, but they prevent the community from seeing that the self-same process has taken place outside. That is to say, modern Europe is also a product of the Enlightenment, and there everything is also permitted. The town of Goray is ultimately wasted within and threatened without. From villages around about peasants come to "exterminate the Jews, man, woman, and child, so that not a trace should be left of the people of Israel."<sup>18</sup> The awaited Messiah proves to have been a false one, and Goray suspects that it was Satan, not the Messiah, who had possessed it. Indeed, Rechele, the girl whose fate throughout the story mirrors the fate of Goray, is driven to madness and, finally, to death when she is impregnated by Satan. The message, spelled out in *The Family Moskat* and made allegory in *Satan in Goray*, is clear: let the dangling and precarious Jew who expects to find his identity in the modern secular world know that the modern secular world is Satan's haunting-ground.

A word about Singer's satans.

Singer's satans and demons have come under fire from critics who see them as irrelevant, at best, and sensationalistic most other times. But to Singer they are a "spiritual stenography," symbols through which he expresses his view of the human condition:

The demons and Satan represent to me, in a sense, the ways of the world. Instead of saying this is the way things happen, I will say, this is the way demons behave. Demons symbolize the world for me, and by that I mean human beings and human behavior.<sup>19</sup>

Singer takes his demons from folklore (sometimes, he says, he uses his imagination; but when he uses his imagination, he says, that, too, is folklore) because, like all folklore, the symbols and images that demonology employs convey innermost beliefs and attitudes of whose existence man's rational faculties are not even aware. The result is a mythicization and universalization of what would otherwise be isolated and particular events in history. The dilemma of freedom, for example, is not solely a modern one. Man has always aimed for freedom from what restrains and limits him. In Singer's demonic fiction it takes the form of freedom from the human condition, from man's position between the beasts and the angels. Here, as before, the more man attempts to free himself from his contradictions, the more he becomes aware of them. He becomes aware of the irreducible tensions which lie in his nature, the contradictory drives, the half-fulfilled ambitions, the chaos within, the maze without exit. It is at this moment, when he is in this most weakened condition, that the demons come to him to tempt him with peace and certainty. They whisper that, indeed, there is a way out, that it is possible to escape the endless struggle,

18. *Satan in Goray* (New York: Noonday Press, 1955), p. 202.

19. Joel Blocker and Richard Elman, "An Interview With Isaac Bashevis Singer," in *Critical Views of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 23.

to achieve integration and wholeness once and for all—by becoming, as it were, all angel or all beast. And Singer's work abounds with those who surrender to demonic voices and become exclusively ascetic or exclusively sensual, exclusively devoted to the spirit or exclusively devoted to the flesh. Singer's demons, in other words, are those impulses in man's psyche which, when perspective and discipline are lacking, begin with a necessary half of a whole and push it to its outer limit until it usurps the whole; they begin with legitimate drives and make of them all-encompassing passions. And this, in Singer's historical fiction, is precisely the function of his messiahs. They come to a society no longer sustained by its traditional framework, a society lacking in firm roots and a firm definition, and they promise perfect and complete and final solutions. Again and again the same ingredients are present: a town, or a girl, weary of the past, of the intolerable present, striving for a different tomorrow; to such a town, or to such a girl, a mysterious stranger appears and promises deliverance; the town, or the girl, follows the stranger to greater and greater perversion; the stranger is unmasked to reveal Satan.

It is to guard himself against just this chain of events that Yasha Mazur, the magician from Lublin, decides to enclose himself in his brick, doorless cell. Walking his tightrope, always on the brink of disaster, Yasha knows that he could always be persuaded to surrender his freedom, the void of his life, to the lure of some satanic promise. Enclosed in his cell he at last feels himself protected from what was the greatest folly of the modern pursuit of freedom: the folly of not seeing that a single-minded drive for freedom and self-sufficiency already carries within it the seeds of a new slavery.

### III

Is, then, Singer suggesting that modern Jews abandon their freedom and return to the past and to Orthodoxy?

The question, of course, is academic. It is impossible to do the former and most Jews today are not likely to attempt the latter. But this, to Singer, is not the problem. The problem is that Orthodoxy can be as much a false slavery as is secularism. In *The Family Moskat*, as another misfortune falls on the Jews, Singer confronts the pious Rabbi Dan with the secularist Jekuthiel and accuses the former of excessive reliance on God just as he accuses the latter of excessive reliance on man:

"Nu, rabbi?" [Jekuthiel] said.

It was clear that what he meant was: Where is your Lord of the Universe now? Where are His miracles? Where is your faith in Torah and prayer?

"Nu, Jekuthiel," the rabbi answered. What he was saying was: Where are your worldly remedies?<sup>20</sup>

20. *The Family Moskat*, pp. 259-260.

Like the "Doctors" and the "Professors," like Reb Mates in Goray, Orthodoxy can remove itself from the world and from life and become simplistic and narrow. For every Goray that Singer produces and condemns for living a life of the flesh, he produces a Yoineh Meir<sup>21</sup> and condemns him for aspiring to a life of the spirit. Yoineh Meir should have become the Kolomir rabbi. Instead, Kolomir made him the ritual slaughterer. But Yoineh Meir is no slaughterer; meat nauseates him. He plans to escape from the physical world and to drown himself in Cabbala: "There, in the higher spheres, there was no death, no slaughtering, no pain . . ." But Yoineh Meir escapes into madness and drowns himself in the river. As Rabbi Jochanan, who throughout *The Manor* and *The Estate* fights his own inclination to escape to some higher sphere, puts it: "Everything is easy for angels; therefore they have no reward. Man must fight for his faith. Every day. Every minute."<sup>22</sup> What Rabbi Jochanan is saying is that human life holds no purities, no totalities or finalities. Every minute and every day man must reject easy escape routes and choose a way that speaks to him in his dualistic condition. "The truth is twofold," says a character in a Singer story. "This is the mystery of all mysteries!"<sup>23</sup>

The fundamental conflict, then, is not between Orthodoxy and secularism, but between genuine and false slavery, between genuine and false freedom.

To Singer, freedom and slavery, to be genuine, cannot exist apart from each other. A genuine slavery permits man his freedom, and genuine freedom is possible only for those grounded in a genuine slavery. To be grounded in a genuine slavery means to be grounded in something which transcends man and his formulations, to seek not peace and certainty but truth. It means, therefore, to accept the paradoxical nature of man's existence, to have faith that life's essence lies precisely in strain and conflict and a constant making and remaking of the self. Those, indeed, in Singer's world who fare best are those who carefully thread their way through a complex and mysterious universe in which—to name but a few—body is always bound up with soul, doubt with faith, and man with God.<sup>24</sup>

The stories of these men afford marvelous insight into the dynamics

21. "The Slaughterer," *The Séance and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968), pp. 17-30.

22. *The Estate*, p. 49.

23. "The Unseen," *Gimpel the Fool and Other Stories* (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), p. 205.

24. Incidentally, in this connection it is important to note that Singer opposes women's lib—another much-pursued freedom in modern times—precisely on the same ground, namely, that it represents an attempt to escape from a troublesome relationship, to split asunder what properly belongs together. The interaction between men and women is not taken by Singer simply in its superficial sense, but reflects for him what is fundamental to all existence. As he explained during our conversation, men and women are "two halves of a whole," they were created "to cooperate and to complement each other"; the relationship between them is "a coming together of contrasts: there is love between them, and there is also a struggle between them . . . they are lovers, and they are also enemies." In fact, in

of genuine faith. What they show is that of all of the contradictions and uncertainties that these men endure, the paradox of good and evil tests them most severely. When confronted with the existence of evil, Singer argues, most men escape from reality into a world that is all good. Elements in both secularism and Orthodoxy, he shows, have done just that. Secular messiahs, worshipping progress and humanity, have ignored man's dark irrational drives and his capacity to do evil. Some among the Orthodox, on the other hand, wishing to worship a good and a just God, live their lives as if evil did not exist: "Deep in his heart," Singer writes about a character in *Enemies, A Love Story*, "Reb Abraham Nissen had no sympathy for those Orthodox Jews who tried to pretend that the Holocaust in Europe had never taken place."<sup>25</sup> Ideally, the believing man should affirm that, although he cannot understand it, evil also has its place in the universe as a necessary half of a whole. But, today, a new possibility has arisen. Today it is possible—still escaping the "all good" trap—to escape from this difficult affirmation. Today it is possible simply to suspend all belief, to live in an absurd and a directionless universe, to declare, as one character does, that the whole business is "a heap of dung," to declare, in other words, one's freedom from God. This is the course that Singer's believers take. What is so instructive about their predicament is that these are men who were never swayed by the secularists' pronouncements on man's freedom, but who now must stop and consider the possibility that the secularists are right, that man is, indeed, alone. It is as if men to whom secularism—the major challenge to faith in modern times—posed no challenge at all, but who had to contend with its implications once—after the Holocaust—it became a possibility.

For Rabbi Nechemia of Bechev,<sup>26</sup> for example, all questions blended into one: why the suffering? One day he had had enough. "You want to conceal your face?" he said to God. "So be it. You conceal yours and I'll conceal mine." And the rabbi set out on the road to Warsaw to join the nonbelievers, "those who believe in nothing." But in Warsaw he found that there were no nonbelievers. All he could find were "the practical ones," those who believed in progress and humanity. "It seems that the world is full of faith," the rabbi muttered to himself. "If you don't believe in one God, you have to believe in another." But he had not come to Warsaw to barter his own faith for another. And so, a sobered Rabbi Nechemia returned home to his God, prepared to embark on a new relationship. What does the story tell us? It restates, first of all, Singer's most basic premise, that total freedom is not a viable option: there are no nonbelievers, no one believes in nothing. And what *do* men believe? In

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accordance with Cabbalistic doctrine, Singer sees the whole cosmos as made up of opposing male and female principles, whose coming together underlies everything: "Everything works in pairs. Although it cannot be proved, there is certainly the possibility that this force which brings together the two principles is as strong, as omnipotent, as is gravitation; if not more so." (Wachtel, *The Jewish Spectator*, pp. 22, 23).

25. *Enemies, A Love Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972), p. 245.

26. "Something Is There," *A Friend of Kafka and Other Stories*, pp. 283-311.

Warsaw's "practical ones," in their optimistic belief in the goodness of man and the inevitability of progress, he recognized his own original naive belief in a God who could do no evil. Both he and "the practical ones" refused to perceive the object of their worship in all of its complexity, as author of both good and evil. "The whole world worships idols," the rabbi concluded upon his return home, "they invent idols and they worship them."

A story that sheds light on the role that evil might play in the lives of men is "Joy."<sup>27</sup> Rabbi Bainish of Komarov, having buried his third son, Bunem, stopped praying for his ailing children. When his youngest daughter, Rebecca, died, he bolted his door, closed the shutters, and sat in his study, silent. "The atheists are right," he finally announced to a disciple, "there is no justice, no Judge . . . nothing but a heap of dung." But, again, the rabbi did not seek a new idol to worship. The problem would not be solved by replacing one system of beliefs with another. The problem, he realized, was with some fundamental assumption underlying his faith. At that moment his dead daughter Rebecca appeared to him "in a whirling mist" and Rabbi Bainish began to understand: man's most profound religious insights come to him not in the midst of clarity and certainty, but in the midst of contradiction. In his final message to his Hasidim he taught them what he had learned:

If hell and paradise were in the middle of the market place, everyone would be a saint. Of all the blessings bestowed on man, the greatest lies in the fact that God's face is forever hidden from him. Men are the children of the Highest, and the Almighty plays hide and seek with them. He hides His face, and the children seek Him while they have faith that He exists.

In other words, if at first it seems that evil is a stumbling block to faith, in the long run, the existence of evil is just the stimulus that forces men to begin to work on a vision which goes beyond the misfortune at hand. If life is a constant making and remaking of the self, the existence of evil is, as it were, a negative stimulus for this creative process, what Singer calls "an inhibition." Taking as his starting point the Cabbalistic idea of *zimzum*—the act of inhibition that preceded the act of creation—Singer explained to me why creation cannot take place in a world that is all good:

According to the Cabbala, God had to diminish Himself, to inhibit Himself, in order to create the world. He could not create as long as His radiance filled the cosmos. You cannot paint, let's say, when everything is sun and light and there is no shadow. Creation works through contrasts. . . . Creation comes when there is something wrong, when something needs to be overcome. That something I call "inhibition." Not every person understands the language of inhibition. Some people take inhibition as the last word, and then it becomes a real inhibition, a permanent inhibition. But those who know how to fight in life, know that small defeats can be the road to large victories: from suffering great things can come. The purpose of

27. *Gimpel the Fool and Other Stories*, pp. 121-133.



each fall is a new rising, the shadow is often the precursor of the light. The inhibition can be an opportunity, a challenge, for greater achievement.<sup>28</sup>

What it is, in the final analysis, is a challenge and an opportunity for man to exercise his freedom and to choose. Every time that man comes up against such a challenge, he comes up against the need to make a choice: whether to surrender to simplistic, idolatrous escape routes, or to stand up and accept the struggle that is human life. In other words, freedom for Singer is not *freedom from* but *freedom to*: freedom to reject a false slavery and to choose for oneself a genuine slavery. This is the story of Jacob of Josefov, *The Slave*.

*The Slave*, one of Singer's finest works, might be retitled "The Varieties of Slavery Experience." Its protagonist, Jacob, passes through various conditions of freedom and slavery. A slave to Polish peasants, he is free to pursue his Jewish religion; free among his fellow Jews, he fears enslavement to their mechanistic religion which contents itself with rituals. A slave, he resists the advances of his master's daughter; a free man, he is enslaved to her memory, as he says, "like one of the Israelite rabble that had wanted to turn and march back to Egypt and slavery for a kettle of meat." His journey through these, and other, adventures may be said to resemble a man's journey through life. In Jacob's case, that journey is dominated by his one overriding slavery: to God. He dutifully follows out his assigned path, convinced that "this is what heaven ordained," and "heaven makes no mistakes." But, then, the climactic moment comes: Jacob's wife dies in childbirth. His newborn son is taken from him, and he himself, chained, is led to prison. At this moment, when the contradiction between his belief and his reality is so large, Jacob rebels. He breaks his chains and escapes; he has declared his freedom from God.

But freedom hangs heavy on Jacob's hands. And, what is more, after he buries his chains he feels himself pursued by demons and satans. It is not long before Jacob chooses to return. His return signifies, first of all, that faith, to be faith, needs to be freely chosen. As the newly bearded and gaberlined Yasha Mazur announced from his cell: "It was not enough for God to guide His children with His merciful hand. They had to learn to cleave to the path of righteousness by themselves, of their own free will."<sup>29</sup> Jacob had to break a wrong, naive, passive slavery, in order to choose for himself a right, sober, and active slavery. In *The Slave* Singer gives a great deal of emphasis to yet another aspect of personal slavery. When Jacob returns to God, he specifically asks for God's help in reclaiming his son and raising him as a Jew. A man's journey through life, Singer says here, is not solely an affair between him and God; it is taken by man as a member in a group. Jacob's slavery is also to his son and to Jewish continuity.

Throughout *The Slave*, paralleling the events and situations in Jacob's life, Singer weaves Biblical events and situations, thus weaving Jacob into

28. Wachtel, *The Jewish Spectator*, p. 21.

29. *The Magician of Lublin*, p. 228.

the fabric of ongoing Jewish history. In the beginning, Jacob awakens high up in the mountains, and he sees below him a chaotic primeval world. Vapor streams up from the deep, and a hawk glides noiselessly over the mists. Every morning, Jacob witnesses the creation of another day, as the sun, "a heavenly lamp," rises. And when it rains, it lashes out with a fury, coming down like a flood; and, always when it rains, a variety of creatures come to seek shelter in Jacob's barn. His slavery is likened to the slavery of Egypt: like Joseph he is ransomed; like Moses he carves the commandments in stone; just as Boaz had his Ruth so Jacob has his Wanda; and so it goes. At story's end, as his Biblical namesake did, so Jacob buries a beloved wife, and, carrying a child, pursued by an Esau, he is crossing the river. "Everything remained the same: the ancient love, the ancient grief. Perhaps four thousand years would again pass; somewhere, at another river, another Jacob would walk mourning another Rachel. Or, who knew, perhaps it was always the same Jacob and the same Rachel . . ." <sup>30</sup> Jacob's journey through life is taken within the framework of God and people and history and, as such, it acquires shape and purpose and a strength beyond his own to meet what comes to meet him. Every event and situation that he meets is a challenge; it is an opportunity to exercise his freedom again and again, and to choose.

But, like a man's journey through life, so is a people's journey through history. There is no end to the making and remaking of a people's identity. The freedoms of the Emancipation and the Enlightenment opened new vistas for the Jews—it was a risk and a challenge to be exposed to them, but it was also another opportunity to choose. What the challenge of emancipation and enlightenment should have meant to the Jews Singer shows when he ends *The Manor*—the novel that records the Jewish movement out into the world. Calman Jacoby, who had moved from a small, quiet existence in his Jewish hut to a rich busy life in the sumptuous manor, who kept finding himself enslaved to needs he never had had before, becomes determined, one fateful night, to return. "Back to the Jews!" he roars his determination, as, searching for a candle, stumbling over a golden candelabrum, he sees how close he had come to losing himself in a house too large, too ornate, and—despite so much enlightenment—so dark.

What it all boils down to is this: only when modern Jews stop pursuing freedom for its own sake, when they stop worshipping idols, when they meet the world from within their own genuine slavery, only then, Singer says, will their freedom be genuine freedom.

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30. *The Slave* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1962), p. 279.

# *The Genesis of Humans: The Garden of Eden Revisited*

ADRIEN JANIS BLEDSTEIN

HOW UNATTRACTIVE WOMAN HAS BEEN AS A human being. For two millennia now the Judeo-Christian tradition has placed man a little lower than the angels and woman a little higher than the demons. Traditionalists have used the Garden of Eden story to say that woman was created as a helpmate to godlike man, as his subordinate and dependent. But woman's curiosity exceeded her intelligence, and by eating from the tree of knowledge as well as seducing man to join her in folly, she has caused man immeasurable suffering. Indeed, predominating interpretations of the Eden story have emphasized the different and unequal characteristics of the human sexes. For example, both the Jewish Rashi and Christian Milton exalted man—the head—and deprecated woman—the body—of humankind. One midrash that described God's thoughts about creating Eve typically pointed up such feminine faults as haughtiness, wantonness, eavesdropping, gossiping, envy, and meddlesomeness. And one modern anthropologist set Eve in a category with "creeping things."<sup>1</sup>

But what ideas prevailed at the time when the Garden of Eden story was written? What social circumstances did the Biblical writer criticize? In the following pages I shall review the narrative as historical literature.

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Mesopotamians had been writing on clay and stone for at least 1500 years before the Hebrews recorded their thoughts on sheepskin, about 1000 BCE. The Sumerians, who lived along the Tigris and Euphrates—rivers described as watering Eden—began keeping records of produce, barter, laws and myths as early as 2500 BCE. They were peace-loving people, yet competitive in personal relations. In satires on daily life they reveal a sense of humor that delights in exposing human foibles. Their myths depict gods and goddesses as larger-than-life humans, while mortals are menial servants who built temples and provided food, wine, and clothing for the fun-loving deities. Worldly disasters—floods, drought, famine, disease, and human deformities—are explained as the result of

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1. Edmund Leach, "Levi-Strauss in the Garden of Eden: An Examination of Some Recent Developments in Analysis of Myth," *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Ser. II, Vol. XXIII (Feb. 1961): 394.

competition for power and self-esteem among equally powerful and interdependent gods and goddesses.

Between 2250 and 1750 BCE Semitic raiders from the Arabian desert invaded and settled in Sumer. As the warrior peoples established themselves along the rivers, they accepted the gods and goddesses of the Sumerians and altered the stories to suit both their own aggressive temperaments and their male-dominated social structure. The Babylonian Creation Epic describes Marduk, warrior god of Babylon, as vanquishing Tiamat, the mother of all things. What the Sumerians had originally told in humorous tales of playful competition between equal gods and goddesses, the Babylonians subsequently told in earnest tales of deadly conflict in which the goddesses are continually humiliated and demeaned. The one goddess exalted in the Creation Epic is Damkianna, mother of Marduk, who is praised for her passivity, her calm, and her nurturing function. Among the Babylonians only Ishtar, goddess of love and war, retains power.

It appears that men personified as feminine those aspects of nature which were dangerous. The feminine image was bifurcated: on the one hand, a mysteriously potent, seductive and fickle female controlled life and death, fertility and growth, while, on the other hand, women were debased to vessels of reproduction and menials of men. The Gilgamesh Epic, for instance, tells of the extraordinary adventures of the hero and his bosom companion, Enkidu. After having been born to, or created by, an all-wise mother goddess, the heroes are nurtured, instructed, served, and sexually satiated by nameless women. However, the men worship the seductive Ishtar though they refuse to satisfy her sexually and despise her power over them.

The Hebrew narrator in the Garden of Eden creation story disputed these literary precedents. Though the Hebrews drew upon the polytheistic tales, they present their own, far-different view of the universe. The Mesopotamians believed that gods and goddesses affected events on earth, while the Hebrews desexualized their Deity and discussed the power of human beings. Though, in origin, the names of the Hebrew God are masculine, YHWH is no male. For the Hebrew narrator, sexuality is human and animal. Indeed, he (or she) no longer describes humans as the Mesopotamians did, as menial servants to a multitude of divinities; intrigues and contests among gods and goddesses do not enter the Garden of Eden story. Throughout Genesis ordinary men and ordinary women are influential in determining the events on an earth which they were created to dominate.

In Genesis, irreverent humor, which is characteristic of Sumerian stories about interdependent male and female deities, is revived in the descriptions of the created beings, humans. With irony and wit the Hebrew narrator tweaks the noses of heroic types. Never dwelling on the hunt or battle, the Hebrew thrusts the hunter-warrior out of the main-

stream of significant humans. Not goddesses but bold women—Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Tamar—determine destinies. Not demigods but cautious men—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—do their best to survive, perhaps by deceiving human potentates, but obeying YHVH.

The simple human tale of the Eden story served to respond to the central issues in ancient literature. Sumerian and Babylonian myths were largely concerned with delineating the prerogatives of various deities. Who creates, who names, who determines destinies—these were the important questions. A master storyteller, the Yahwist Hebrew narrator naturally drew upon the questions that had become classic in that world.

### **Who Creates?**

The Sumerians believed in the sexual production of all things. By means of mutual pleasure or deception, interdependent deities propagated new species. In the Sumerian paradise myth, the barren earth of Dilmun is watered by Enki, the god of sweet water, and vegetation grows from his semen when it impregnates Nintu, the goddess earth. With the god's semen or with Enki "seated in her vulva," Nintu gives birth to goddesses, brings forth plants, and causes minor deities "to be born."<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the only deity in Genesis is YHVH who causes rain, a mist, or water to well up from the ground. The erected phallus of a proud god pouring semen into the womb of mother earth is conspicuously absent in Hebrew descriptions of fructifying the ground. Though its name is a feminine noun—*adamah*—earth is simply the substance from which all grows or is formed.

The non-sexual image of YHVH serenely incorporates all of the powers and methods of creation. YHVH forms man from clay. The Hebrew conception of the Deity drew upon the image of the Sumerian mother goddess, just as watering the barren earth drew upon the image of the god Enki. But, in both cases, YHVH alone does the creating. Sexual personification of the creating Deity does not enter the picture. YHVH combines the molded clay with Divine breath, not with blood and flesh. Later, YHVH "builds" the woman from the bone, flesh, and blood of the sleeping man—who is not a slain god. The Hebrew narrator drew upon associations from the Sumerian paradise myth and the creation of Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic but without sexually identifying the creative YHVH. As Nintu plants the semen of Enki, YHVH alone plants a garden. Man is placed in the Garden of Eden as Enkidu had been cast upon the steppe.<sup>3</sup>

YHVH specifies the purpose of man's presence in the garden, to "till and to tend it" (Gen. 2:15). YHVH creates everything; man's function is to

2. James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press) p. 40, n. 52.

3. E. A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 16. "Heb. *eden*, Akk. *edinu*, based on Sum. *eden* 'plain, steppe.'"

use and take care of what YHVH has created. Indeed, compared to what was required of the menial, mortal servants of Sumerian and Babylonian deities, Adam's responsibilities are simple, his liberties considerable. YHVH does not demand that he build great cities with temples, that he grow and prepare food, or that he make clothes for gods and goddesses.

However, the Creator does restrict the earthling in one significant respect. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," or "be doomed to death" (Gen. 2:16-17). From the tree of life (in Gilgamesh, a secret of the gods buried deep in the sea) Adam may freely eat. But the knowledge of all possible things, good and bad, emerges as the one Divine prerogative withheld by injunction from human reach.

If YHVH's edict were a harsh threat, challenging an innocent being to disobey and court death, YHVH would indeed appear to be a mean deity, jealous of powers that might be usurped. However, perhaps YHVH's warning expressed a benevolent concern for the earthling responsible for taking care of all the YHVH had formed. In the Hebrew conception, knowledge of all possibilities reflects a dimension of divine knowledge which human beings might use destructively as well as creatively. Knowledge is power that can endanger the naive, human possessor.

The presence of the tree of knowledge may have served the same purpose that a Sumerian contest between Nintu and Enki serves in explaining the suffering of humans. Drunk with wine, the gods and goddess have their usual prerogatives suspended. In turn, they form abnormal human beings—suffering—in order to discover the limits of the human body. But, unlike these inebriated, competitive, and sometimes cruel deities, YHVH is not a jealous deity protecting a power unique to the Divine. For the Hebrew narrator, human beings pretending to be gods and goddesses would bring suffering upon themselves. Thus, the tree of knowledge in Eden relates to a primary concern of the narrator, to portray humans as responsible for their own actions.

### ***Who Names?***

YHVH Elohim said: "It is not right that man should be alone: I will make him an aid fit for him." So YHVH Elohim formed out of the soil various wild beasts and birds of the sky and brought them to the man to see what he called them; whatever the man would call a living creature, that was to be its name. The man gave names to all cattle, all birds of the sky, and all wild beasts; yet none proved to be the aid that would be fit for man (Gen. 2:18-20).<sup>4</sup>

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4. Translations of the Hebrew text are drawn from Speiser, *Op. cit.*; *The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America) 1955.

According to Genesis, man is permitted the important prerogative of naming new species, a coveted creative act among the divinities of Mesopotamia. In the Sumerian paradise myth the mother goddess removes her eye of life from the water god because he has usurped her power to name new plants. Sumerians imagined that a catastrophe of nature occurred over the problem of: who names? But YHVH conferred on the human the power of naming. The innocent man who lived in the Garden of Eden was not ignorant. Though an earthling, he was verbally creative, as YHVH has authorized him to name, as well as to care for, what YHVH had formed.

Why is man created alone? Why is woman created separately, from man's rib, and after the animals? The Hebrew narrator, it appears, meant to disassociate fertility from sexuality—a significant deviation from the mythological literature. The Sumerians, Babylonians, and Canaanites assume that sexual relations between god and goddess cause fertility of the soil. The Canaanites used the sympathetic magic of humans copulating in the fields in order to influence the deities to do the same, while the Sumerians joyously celebrated the sacred marriage rite between goddess and god with sensual courting songs and a nuptial ceremony of king and priestess who represented god and goddess.

However, sexuality in the Genesis creation story does not precede the existence of the earth or of man. Asexual YHVH alone makes plants grow; sexuality takes its place as a dimension of YHVH's creation. Male and female are necessary for the reproduction of earthly species, but, emphatically, the Hebrew narrator does not depict earth and rain as sexual beings.

Nowhere in extant Mesopotamian literature do we find separate creations of man and woman. The closest parallel to the scene of a lone male with animals and the subsequent introduction of a woman appears in the opening tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic. The mother-goddess creates Enkidu from clay and then she casts him on the steppe (*edinu* = Eden) where he lives alone with animals. A harlot from the city seduces Enkidu, and his animal companions reject him. By means of his sexual experience with a woman, Enkidu attains "broader understanding" and becomes "like a god." The harlot then leads Enkidu to the hero, Gilgamesh, for whom Enkidu has been specifically created to be a companion. The unnamed harlot vanishes after having fulfilled her purpose of raising the savage above the animals and teaching him to be a man.

Adapting the familiar story to a novel end, the Hebrew narrator recounts that YHVH forms a man from clods of soil and places him in a garden called Eden. YHVH concludes that man needs a helper "corresponding to him" and creates the animals from the earth. In contrast to Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic, the lone man in Genesis does not recognize the animals as aids "alongside" him.<sup>5</sup> No woman comes to seduce Adam

5. Speiser, *Op. cit.*, p. 17.



away from his wild beasts. Indeed, YHVH creates woman after the man rejects the animals and still yearns for companionship. In the Gilgamesh Epic, Enkidu enjoys the harlot, learns from her, but does not consider her to be a comrade. Alienated from the animals, Enkidu also wishes to have a friend—a man like himself. Adam, however, immediately and enthusiastically recognizes the woman as his companion and sexual partner.

Then YHVH Elohim cast a deep sleep upon the man and, when he was asleep, he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And YHVH Elohim fashioned into a woman the rib that he had removed from the man, and he brought her to the man. Said the man, "This one at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, for she was taken from Man." Thus it is that man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh (Gen.2:21-24).

The ancients obviously knew the process of reproduction: women bore children. The idea that the first woman is born from the first man—a unique tale in all extant Mesopotamian literature—contradicts observable fact. Why did the Hebrew narrator indulge in this humorous defiance of common sense?

YHVH, the creator of all, can do anything. It is the Yahwist narrator who dramatizes Sarah's laughter at the possibility that she, a barren old woman past childbearing age, can have pleasure (*ednah*, derived from *eden*) with her old man and become impregnated. "Is anything too hard for YHVH?" the Deity asks rhetorically (Gen. 18:12-14). YHVH can close or open the womb. YHVH can create man from clay and form a woman from bone and flesh. YHVH can flood the earth and destroy two cities with fire and brimstone.

The first human birth on earth issues from the man. As it would be from a goddess, the process is painless. But the absence of pain is due to YHVH's kindly casting a deep sleep upon the man, the father of humans. (In the Babylonian Creation Epic, Ea uses a similar spell to ease the task of killing the father of the gods.)

Why is woman formed from man's rib? In the Sumerian paradise myth, the earth goddess and mother of all living, Nintu, creates the goddess, Ninti, to heal the ailing rib of the water god. The gods and goddesses created by Nintu are manifestations of her power and prerogatives in the creative process. The Hebrew narrator drew upon a tale in which the female asserted her importance. Fond of punning with titles and names, the narrator plays on the image of woman born from man's rib, a parallel to the lady of the rib, Ninti. The Sumerian word *ti* also means "to make life."<sup>6</sup> Thus, later, the woman is named Eve, "the mother of all the living." In the Hebrew tale, YHVH appropriates the powers and the humanized female, woman, appropriates the titles of the goddesses.

Poetically, the Hebrew balance of *adam* drawn from *adamah*, mas-

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6. Samuel Noah Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), p. 149.

culine from feminine, and *ishah* drawn from *ish*, feminine from masculine, completes a sexually balanced cycle of creation. Etymologically, *ishah* does not arise from *ish*, which emphasizes the deliberation of the poet's punning. In Genesis 2:24 the unpatriarchal act of the man leaving his parents to cling to his wife becomes not so much evidence of matriarchy, though that was a possibility; rather, it stands in contrast to warrior values of a male seeking male companionship, typical of the heroic literature that the narrator of the Genesis creation story intended to criticize.

In a charming, humorous, folksy tale the Hebrew narrator eliminates sexuality as a divine characteristic and asserts the equality of human sexes as destined companions. The man is neither god nor heroic demigod, the woman neither a goddess above him nor a servant below him. The narrator describes the ideal in human relations. YHVH alone has preceded the existence of fertility on the earth. YHVH creates an earthling to care for, to name, and to enjoy the creation in its plenitude. YHVH forms woman from the bone and flesh of the living man to be the man's equal opposite him and his sexual partner, not a subservient consort. She, too, will name, care for, and enjoy what YHVH has created.

In the harmony of Eden the man and his wife are naked and "not ashamed." The Hebrew word for shame here is *bosh*, which suggests paleness, terror and indignation. In Mesopotamian letters, nakedness implies vulnerability associated with love and death. Interdependent gods and goddesses turn pale when their self-esteem is threatened. But the human couple in Eden is naked, they cling to one another, and become one flesh in sexual delight without experiencing defensive-hostile emotions described as becoming pale. How, then, did human beings become vulnerable, selfish, oppressive and shameful beings? This brings us to the third important theme for the ancients: Who determines destinies?

### ***Who Determines Destinies?***

Genesis 3 has often been called "The Fall of Man" with the emphasis upon Adam's disobedience and the fall from innocence. However, "The Fall of Man" is a misnomer when one considers the prominent part played by woman, the scant treatment of the actual disobedience, and the dramatic verbal encounter involving Adam and Eve and YHVH. The story actually focuses not on the loss of innocence, but on how it came to pass and on the human response. The narrator, an inspired but still mortal being, recognized the shortcomings of human wisdom.

How is it that human beings know and dare so much, yet truly understand so little? Why do well-intentioned acts often lead to disaster? Why do petty or maliciously intended actions sometimes lead to blessings for a multitude? The entire saga of the Hebrew narrator wrestles with these questions. The problem is stated in Genesis 3: Who determines destinies? The answer is as complex as the Eden tale is simple.

"Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field that YHVH Elohim had made" (Gen. 3:1). Why a serpent? Why not a fox like

the cunning fox who persuaded the mother goddess to return to heal the ailing water god?

A web of associations has added meanings to the choice of a reptile. A serpent, for instance, snatches the life-rejuvenating plant from Gilgamesh. Moreover, in Canaanite, Syrian, and Phoenician cults the serpent is a fertility symbol of life coiling out of the earth. An intimate connection is drawn, in those cults, between the genital area of the mother goddess, the serpent, and the issue of life.

Images, plaques, and objects dating from before 1000 BCE and associating the serpent with the goddess and with sex have been unearthed in the Near East, and Karen Randolph Joines has suggested that the serpent entered Israel's cultic imagery between 1225 BCE and 850 BCE. She has located the serpent during King David's reign, suggesting to us that the serpent was a totem of David's house. Joines has further speculated that "if the cultic serpent retained in Israel the significance it had in other Ancient Near Eastern cults ... Nehushtan was adopted from the Canaanites to affirm the agricultural power of YHVH."<sup>7</sup> Usually the Yahwist narrator is dated during either David's or Solomon's reign, and it is possible that the Yahwist criticized idolatrous practices among the Israelites by creating a role for the serpent in Eden in order to disassociate the serpent and the goddess from power over agriculture.

Described as a "beast of the field" that is created by YHVH, the serpent is neither a divine being nor a manifestation of supernatural beings. However, the serpent has subtlety, most likely a proverbial characteristic of the serpent in the humor of the Ancient Near East, especially given the sexual associations of this particular symbol. The choice of words—*arom* for naked in the sentence preceding and *arum* for subtle or cunning—suggests such connotations. The serpent's ability to talk symbolizes the cultic belief in its oracular powers.

In Genesis the serpent is separate from the woman; it speaks to her but it neither coils about her limbs nor does it rest its head near her genitalia. "Yea, hath Elohim said: 'Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" In this question the serpent exaggerates YHVH's command not to eat of one tree by now including "not any tree." The woman assures him—"Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat"—then she clarifies the command as she understands it—"But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, Elohim hath said: Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Gen: 2-3). The woman's answer can help us understand why the serpent addresses her rather than the man.

The woman is vague about which tree is forbidden for eating. The tree in the midst of the garden can refer to either the tree of life or the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She never calls the forbidden tree by name. Also, she adds in her description—"Neither shall ye touch it"—an injunction absent in YHVH's original warning. Perhaps she is mistaken

7. Karen Randolph Joines, "The Bronze Serpent in the Israelite Cult," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 87 (1968): 255.

about what YHVH had actually prohibited because she is the second-born human, not yet alive when YHVH had cautioned the man. She received her knowledge only second-hand, from the man.

As the second-born,<sup>8</sup> the woman is less experienced. After all, YHVH did not speak directly to her. She has not established any direct relationship to YHVH or to the command. Not having named the serpent, the woman might reasonably believe that the serpent's intelligence is equal to both hers and the man's. Is not the serpent's personal manner and direct approach more persuasive to the woman than any hearsay conveyed by the man? Both the serpent and the woman speak of Elohim, not YHVH Elohim, thereby depersonalizing YHVH to an abstraction of divine beings—a false notion in the Yahwist narrator's monotheism. Indeed, the context of the story suggests that the Yahwist intended to deliver a satirical diatribe against the loose reference to YHVH as Elohim.

What does the serpent offer the woman? "Ye shall not surely die: for Elohim doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as elohim, knowing good and evil." By addressing the woman directly, the serpent recognizes her existence, as YHVH had not. The serpent persuades the woman that she and the man could be as elohim, as divine beings. Divinity comes from the broader knowledge that eating the fruit would bestow upon mortals. The Sumerian god Enki eats from the plants to gain special knowledge that he might have the power to decree "their fate" and determine their destinies. "And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took the fruit," touched it but did not die, "and did eat."

The woman imagines that the fruit would "make one wise," bestow wisdom (*sekhel*) as well as knowledge (*da'at*). The narrator of Gilgamesh says of Enkidu, "Now he had wisdom, broader understanding." And the harlot tells him, "Thou art wise, Enkidu, art become like a god!"<sup>9</sup> Knowledge, broader understanding and wisdom in Gilgamesh are available to a human being. Only immortality and a particular office in the pantheon separate Enkidu and Gilgamesh from the gods. But, in the unfolding drama of the Hebrew narrator, the assumption that knowledge is wisdom, that humans can be like YHVH, is emphatically denied.

"Wisdom and broader understanding" for Enkidu result from his sexual experience with the harlot. But the Hebrew narrator associates neither wisdom nor understanding with the sexual experience of the primal pair. The creation of woman has introduced human sexual pleasure into Eden, the man and woman are husband and wife, "one flesh." Besides being human companions they are sexual partners, "naked and not ashamed." The subtle serpent, not their innocent sexual enjoyment,

8. Second-born in Genesis does not imply inferiority. The first-born was generally surpassed by the later born: Abel chosen over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Judah and Joseph over Reuben.

9. Pritchard, *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

introduces the possibilities of greater knowledge and godlike divinity into the Eden story. Sexual associations with the serpent may have added a dimension of humor to the story, but such associations do not overtly enter the scene involving the naked woman and the tree.

"And she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." Suddenly we are fully aware of Adam's presence. He does not question the woman or the serpent. She simply gives him the fruit. We do not know whether she seduced him. Apparently his eating of the fruit from his wife's hand requires neither comment, dramatization, nor emphasis. Later YHWH punishes Adam for listening to the voice of his wife rather than to the voice of YHWH, but the absence of what she said to him underscores how easily the man doubted his own knowledge and intelligence from YHWH.

Whereas the heroic literature emphasizes the differences between the sexes, the Hebrew story emphasizes the difference between human beings and the Divine. After acquiring divine knowledge, man and woman express their feelings by the gesture of covering their nakedness. "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves girdles" (Gen. 3:7). What do they suddenly "know" that prompts them to clothe themselves?

They become conscious of alternatives, from things as they should be to things as they are flawed. In Biblical Hebrew the conjunction of two opposites, such as good and evil, includes all possibilities between the extremes. The good or beautiful is "that which is as it ought to be."<sup>10</sup> Humans are created with the consciousness of the good. Adam's power to name the animals arises from his perception of their essences, their natures. The moment when he sees the woman he joyfully recognizes in her another human and his natural sexual complement. He calls her wife and he is called husband. In their primeval state, humans experience each other and all things as they are intended to be.

The humans lack—and are warned against—awareness of the full range of possibilities of things as they should not be: the perverse, the unnatural, the destructive. Experience acquires new meanings and depths. Expression of a basic desire like the sexual one, which had been unambiguously pleasurable before eating the forbidden fruit, is accompanied by anxieties and guilt after the event. The consequence of the enlarged vision is vividly dramatized. Concealing sexual differences is the first manifestation of a loss of self-esteem. Covering themselves suggests shame (becoming pale), indignation, and fear, no one of which had possessed the humans earlier. Their conception of their place in relation to each other, to YHWH and all that YHWH had created, is altered. Each

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10. Robert Gordis, *Poets, Prophets, and Sages: Essays in Biblical Interpretation* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 214, n. 35; Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), p. 87.

person feels isolated and vulnerable, perhaps perverse, and seeks to clothe the obvious dissimilarities.

When YHVH's voice is heard approaching, they hide themselves. In answer to YHVH's question, "Where art thou?" the man says: "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." The woman spoke of "we" before eating the fruit; the man speaks of "I" afterwards. In a double-entendre, the word used by Adam for naked is again *arom*, implying wit or subtlety. "Who told thee that thou wast naked (clever)?" YHVH does not wait for an answer because the Divine knows. YHVH asks only that the man might consider. "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?" The man answers, revealing the wisdom or foolishness of his new knowledge. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." The man answers honestly, admitting that he has eaten from the tree, but the answer is subtle. Cunning like the serpent, he shifts the blame to YHVH for giving him the woman, and to the woman for giving him the fruit. YHVH does not comment on the man's wit, but addresses the woman. "What is this thou hast done?" She, too, shifts the blame, "the serpent beguiled me," but admits that she has been gullible and has eaten. Now, separated by their new awareness but sexually interdependent, humans become as vulnerable as gods and goddesses to exploitive passion, fear, and death. Life becomes more interesting and more difficult.

YHVH then curses the articulate serpent and offers no opportunity for it to respond. "Because thou hast done this, cursed art thou from among all the cattle and from among all the beasts of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" (Gen. 3:14). From the most subtle and talented of beasts the serpent turns into the most despised, the lowliest one. In the Hebrew narrative, the serpent's proximity to the earth relates neither to his intimate association with mother earth nor to a fertility deity, but to YHVH's curse for his part in estranging humans from each other and from YHVH.

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; they shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise their heel" (Gen. 3:15). The Hebrew narrator views the serpent as an enemy of the woman, not as her partner in the divine power of creation. "Her seed" or progeny will bruise the serpent's head in succeeding generations.

The woman described here has "seed" or progeny within her. She does not serve merely as a receptacle of man's seed. Simple word choice presents a wholly radical view of woman by breaking down the dominant masculine image of mother earth as the container of the god's semen. In Canaanite literature, for instance, "a husband was like a farmer who cultivated the soil so that it yields a harvest. A woman, like a field, needs the seed and cultivation of a husband, if she is to be fertile."<sup>11</sup> In the

11. Cyrus Gordon, "Canaanite Mythology," *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. S. N. Kramer (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961), pp. 214-215.



Yahwist's view, both woman and man are mutually interdependent for reproduction and equally responsible for the fates of their children. The Hebrew narrator records the family's blessing of Rebekah: "Our sister, may you become the mother of hundreds of thousands, and your seed possess the gate of those that hate them" (Gen. 24:60). Rebekah becomes the dominating personage in her generation—not a "field" to be "cultivated." To Hagar, the angel of YHVH says, "I will greatly multiply thy seed" if Hagar will submit herself to Sarah (Gen. 16:10). Both Hagar and Sarah actively influence the fates of their children.

If woman is not merely the incubator of man's seed, neither is she the Creatrix. A female bruising the serpent's head resembles Eurynome, "the Goddess of All Things" who kicks the serpent Ophion off of Mount Olympus for "claiming to be the author of the Universe."<sup>12</sup> According to Robert Graves, Iahu (exalted dove) is the Sumerian title of Eurynome (wise wandering), and YHVH is a derivative of Iahu (Yahu). In any case, the woman in Eden is no goddess, and her relationship to the serpent turns from amity to enmity.

After cursing the serpent, YHVH again speaks to the woman, but does not curse her or the man. To remind the woman that she is a human being, not a goddess in her power of procreation, YHVH says, "I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy travail; in pain thou shalt bring forth children" (Gen. 3:16). YHVH intensifies the discomfort of human labor in giving birth, a deliberate contrast to the Sumerian paradise myth where goddesses painlessly bear after nine days of "womanhood."

The Hebrew narrator implies that the woman might have had children less painfully in Eden. YHVH has created her as the man's wife, and though the man has no human father and mother, the Yahwist uses the expression "a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife." Knowledge has opened human eyes to the possibilities of life, for better or worse. Man and woman do not gain the power to procreate, in lieu of immortality. Procreation is no punishment; pain is. The Yahwist assumes that sexual pleasure and reproduction could occur in Eden.

YHVH forecasts the social consequences that will accompany the difficulties of travail. "Thy desire shall be to thy husband; and he shall rule over thee" (Gen 3:16). In subsequent stories the Hebrew narrator presents patriarchal domination of women as a bane to the relations between woman, man, their children and YHVH. In the Babylonian Creation Epic, male superiority is explained simply as the punishment of the first woman, not as a curse that must last throughout all generations.

YHVH admonishes the man, the first-born human, "because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife." Man has listened to the woman as if she were divine, "and hast eaten of the tree, which I commanded thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake" (Gen. 3:17). YHVH curses not the man but the substance from which YHVH has created man and everything that humans need to live. "In toil

12 Robert Graves, *Greek Myths*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Penquin Books, 1955), vol. I pp. 1-2.



shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken" (Gen. 3:19). In her procreative function woman is reminded that she is human; in his responsibility as guardian and tiller of the earth the man will be frustrated and, finally, death will remind him that "dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return," a poetic return to the beginning.

Ancient Mesopotamians explained infertility of the earth with a variety of myths suggesting that human destiny is incidental to the whims of gods and goddesses. Through human faith in sympathetic magic, fertility cults tried to influence the deities to make the earth fruitful. The Yahwist specifically rejected the cultist assumption that human sexuality permitted human control of the fertility of the earth. YHVH alone made the land fruitful and placed humans on earth to care for it. The Sumerian image of a god inseminating goddess after goddess with plants growing from the god's semen drained from the thighs of a goddess is conspicuously absent in the Hebrew story.

Most dramatically, the Hebrew narration presents the common human tendency to shift blame as the cause of human suffering. One might hypothetically suggest that if the man and woman had been less subtle and had accepted full responsibility, had been humanly wise, YHVH might not have had to separate them from the tree of life. But, of course, such an ending is impossible. One purpose of the tale is to explain how noble human beings debased themselves and made death necessary. The idea that humans brought death upon themselves, that their choice had far-reaching consequences in determining their fate and that of their progeny, conflicts with the Gilgamesh story in which the gods reserve immortality for themselves. Subsequent stories by the Yahwist suggest that men and woman can become blessed through faith and acts of obedience to YHVH. The pain of childbirth and the curse of the earth need not enslave the woman to the man, nor the man to drudgery.

After hearing their punishments, the man names the woman Eve, "the mother of all living." Ironically, when the woman is least powerful she receives the title of the great goddess. The awesome mother of all living is human; men need not fear her.

YHVH then bars humans from the tree of life. They possess a fuller knowledge but not the transcendent wisdom of the Divine. Lest they live forever with divine knowledge which they could scarcely handle, they must be separated from immortality. They are doomed to die as YHVH has forewarned.

In answer to the question "Who determines destinies?" the Hebrew narrator dramatizes the message: In the world of being and possibilities created by YHVH, human beings, wittingly and unwittingly, choose their destinies.

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Hebrews experienced their Deity as neither male nor female, a no-

tion that transcends the confines of their language. The desexualization of nature ideally removed the power of one sex over the other, a concept that had evoked chaos in the imaginations of Mesopotamians. Hebrews asserted that sexuality was human and animal, merely an aspect of their reproductive function and pleasure rather than an all-pervasive, mysterious threat to survival or a source of extraordinary blessing.

For instance, the Babylonian love goddess, Ishtar, offers the hero, Gilgamesh, double of all his produce, power over all men, and a magical dais that would kiss his feet, if he will become her husband. But Gilgamesh insults her with tales of her inconstant nature. The hero then suffers cosmic wrath: his people are attacked by a fire-breathing bull from heaven, they suffer seven years of famine, and he personally experiences the slow, agonizing death of his dearest friend, Enkidu. Nothing like this takes place in the Genesis story.

In Hebrew thought, men are reduced from heroic, godlike beings to earthlings. Females are no longer divided into life- and death-dealing goddesses, on the one hand, or slavish menials of men on the other hand. Man and woman are equally human and each aspires to be as the gods and goddesses of mythology. Oppression, misery, slavery, disease, hard work, pain, all are attributed to the human tendency to confuse knowledge with wisdom, to act like gods and goddesses in shifting blame to another for any threat to their self esteem.

Why, then, has Torah been read for proof of woman's inferiority? Why did earliest rabbis see Adam as so beautiful that Eve was an "ape" in comparison? What mutual human frustrations pricked Maimonides to conclude that "the wife should wash her husband's hands and feet and serve him at table or be beaten"?<sup>13</sup> What happened in history to prompt the predominating tradition of post-Biblical Judaism to distort the triumph of Hebrew monotheism in desexualizing Divinity and humanizing woman and man? Are we ready yet to appreciate the Hebrew version of the genesis of humans—a radically humanist and feminist statement both in its time and for our time?<sup>14</sup>

13. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909), vol. 1 p. 60; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Ishut* 21:3, 10.

14. For further reading see Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (March 1973): 30-48; Clarence Vos, *Women in Old Testament Worship* (Delft: N. V. Verenigde Drukkerijen Judels and Brinkman) no date, pp. 10-27.

# *Jewish Otherworldliness*

BERNARD J. BAMBERGER

MODERN JEWISH APOLOGISTS HAVE PROUDLY characterized Judaism as a this-worldly religion, contrasting it sharply with otherworldly Christianity. Judaism, they say, is concerned with living righteously and building a just society here on earth, while Christianity views this life as a vale of tears and tries to save individual souls from perdition and guide them to bliss beyond the grave. And, whereas the New Testament is preoccupied with the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" the Hebrew Bible hardly mentions the idea of immortality, and that only in its latest books.

In the terms just stated, such a distinction is imprecise and even unfair. On the one hand, the Christian churches have also occupied themselves with the tasks of personal and social morality. On the other hand, post-Biblical Judaism (at least until the modern period) has been permeated with otherworldly considerations. The statement of Rabbi Jacob, "This world is like the antechamber of the world to come. Prepare yourself in the antechamber, that you may be admitted to the banquet hall" is typical. One could cite innumerable parallels to it from rabbinic and medieval Jewish literature. This point has been vigorously emphasized by Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan, who regards it as part of his task to strip away such otherworldliness and restore Judaism to a this-worldliness in keeping both with its Biblical foundations and with the demands of modern thought and sensibility.

But, here, too, some qualifications are needed. It appears that scholars have understated the extent to which the idea of an after-life appears in the Bible. Dr. Herbert C. Brichto has argued that this concept not only influenced Biblical thought, but also affected the development of social institutions.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not we accept his elaborate structure of hypotheses, we must admit that he has a point. The Biblical picture of Sheol is not an attractive one, but it is a picture of continued, even though shadowy, existence. Moreover, the fact that Job denies and Ecclesiastes questions the belief in immortality is sufficient evidence that it had its adherents.

Nor has the hope of personal immortality disappeared from modern Judaism. Traditional Jews daily affirm in their prayers their belief in the resurrection of the dead, and they attach enormous importance to the

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert C. Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land, and Afterlife—a Biblical Complex," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. XLIV, 1974.

intercessionary prayers, *El Male Rahamim* and *Yizkor*. (It must be admitted that many who recite these prayers faithfully do so not out of conviction that they are efficacious, but simply to carry out the wishes of deceased parents.) But even among modernist Jews the issue is not obsolete. Some may reject altogether the hope of the survival of personal consciousness; many others believe, or at least hope, that there is something more beyond death. They are not apparently worried about post-mortem retribution; our Jews generally have rather easy consciences. But some rebel against the thought of total extinction, and many cherish the hope of being somehow reunited with their beloved dead.

In addition, we need to inquire more thoroughly into what is meant by this-worldliness and otherworldliness. (In what follows I draw freely on the second chapter of Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic work, *The Great Chain of Being*.) These two concepts are not to be distinguished as the mere affirmation or denial (or disregard) of life beyond the grave. Sometimes the belief in immortality is an extreme expression of this-worldliness—the desire to have all the good things of this life endlessly, vastly improved and without their usual disadvantages, either as the continuation of a happy life here, or as compensation for frustrations and sufferings endured in this world. This applies whether the delights we anticipate are those of roast Leviathan and primordial wine, or of learning Torah from the mouth of Moses our master in the Heavenly Academy.

True otherworldliness, says Lovejoy, always involved a denigration of this world as essentially disappointing, vain, and insubstantial. There are two general versions of the otherworldly outlook. The Western one, derived from Plato and the Platonists, contrasts the world of sense—constantly shifting and changing, devoid of clarity and permanence, bewildering the mind and leaving the heart hungry—with the world of the Ideas—changeless and eternal, not fully to be grasped by the intellect, yet capable of giving to the contemplative soul peace and even ecstasy. Still, Plato allows some measure of reality to the visible world: the chairs and tables we use daily are copies, even though imperfect and unstable, of the idea Table and Chair glimpsed by the philosophic mind. This world thus remains a problem: how and why did it come into existence, and what are its legitimate claims upon us?

The eastern formulation of otherworldliness sought to escape the problem by dismissing the entire visible world as sheer illusion. Hinduism regards the world of mystical contemplation, the world of Brahma, as the true reality. Early Buddhism, however, not only rejected this world as illusory, but apparently attached no reality to any other kind of existence: it was otherworldliness without another world.

Here we need not consider this eastern version further. But Plato and all his followers—Pagan, Christian, Moslem, and Jewish—have had to struggle with the conflict between a doctrine that required man to despise, flee, or at least downgrade this world, and the fact that this world won't go away and has to be dealt with somehow. The very philosophic caste which

was qualified to contemplate timeless Reality was summoned by Plato to leave such spiritual delights and apply its wisdom to the conduct of government. The Church found it proper to make a distinction between those who were called to give up this world altogether for the "religious" life and those who strove to be Christians while living in the world. This distinction, be it noted, does not coincide with the distinction between clergy and laity. Yet saints and mystics not infrequently became involved in worldly affairs, sometimes on their own initiative, sometimes in reluctant response to the call of duty; and some of them manifested exceptional talents for administration and for political negotiation.

On the other hand, the denigration of this world affected even those who continued to enjoy its opportunities and pleasures. The identification of the flesh and the devil has haunted western culture even to this day, despite Freudian and other attempts to exorcise it; and the Calvinistic assumption that anything enjoyable is to be judged frivolous, if not sinful, seems to have been dissipated only in recent years.

In particular, the rejection of this world supplied the rationale for ascetic practices, which the Church generally commended, while recognizing that not all persons were spiritually qualified for them. The glorification of celibacy and the canonization of many individuals who practiced severe austerity must have affected the thought of large masses who, themselves, did not undertake to practice such austerities, but felt somehow inferior because they did not.

Now, medieval Jewish literature advocates at least a moderate asceticism. Philosophers, mystics and moralists exhort their readers to renounce unnecessary enjoyments. One should indulge in food, drink and sex only to the extent necessary to maintain health and domestic tranquility, and to fulfill one's religious duties. A man's energies should be concentrated on the study of Torah (whether in the traditional Talmudic version, or in philosophic and cabalistic flights) and on repentance and good deeds. Some counselled a more extreme form of self-denial. Eleazar Rokeach, for example, designed a system of austere penances. In the seventeenth century, the trend toward severe asceticism became more widespread through the influence of Lurian cabala.

An instructive sample of Jewish otherworldliness is furnished by the *Mesilat Yesharim* (Path of the Upright) of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto. Though published in 1740, it is a typically medieval document, and in the first chapter the author states bluntly that man's purpose in this life must be to qualify for the world to come. This life is brief and frustrating, few people find any true fulfillment or happiness in it. But how does one prepare for entrance into the next world? Luzzatto gives a ringing response: by performing the *mizvot*, the commandments of the Torah.

And here we find the distinctive character of Jewish otherworldliness. The "yoke of the commandments" must be borne by every Jew, learned or scholarly, day laborer or banker, including the philosopher

and the mystic. And the *mizvot*, even if they are considered a means of preparing for the next world, attach us solidly to this one!

The *mizvot* accomplished this in two ways. First, because they are, for the most part, overt and concrete actions. Some are ceremonial, but many concern our social obligations. No Jew was exempt from the responsibility of establishing and supporting a family, and from the obligation to share in maintaining and conducting the institutions of community life. By contrast, the Christian monastic orders, though they imposed hard work on their members, provided a very simply ordered and well structured pattern of living, with none of the distractions of the world; and the mendicant orders gave an approved status even to the dropout.

Second, the *mizvah* system made it obligatory on the most ascetic individual to enjoy at least a minimum of this world's pleasures. It was his duty to eat meat and drink wine on Sabbaths and festivals, and to wear better clothes on those occasions. He might observe not only Yom Kippur and Tish'ah b'Av, but all the minor fasts, and add voluntary fasts of his own; but he was still obliged to be joyful on Sabbath and Yom Tov, and to have fun on Simhat Torah and Purim. Moreover, a man had the inescapable duty not only to marry and beget children, but, also, to respond to his wife's sexual needs. Even if he wanted to, he could not deny himself all pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the Lurian cabala, while encouraging some extreme forms of austerity, also ascribed enormous efficacy to the practice of the *mizvot*. Earlier teachers had held that human acts have powerful repercussions in the upper worlds, restoring and strengthening the divine powers, or the reverse. But Luria added to this the doctrine that the cosmic redemption and the coming of the Messiah can be brought about by faithful performance of the commandments—which encompass not only devotional practice, but personal and social righteousness as well.

In Jewish thinking, this world and the next are not only contrasted, but also interlocked. This explains some of the paradoxical utterances of the Rabbis. That same Rabbi Jacob who compared this world to an antechamber also taught: "One hour spent in repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the world to come; yet one hour of bliss in the world to come is better than all the life of this world."

Even though they held the next world to be the more important, the

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2. It may be argued with some plausibility that, whereas otherworldliness was an inherent component of the Platonic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist world views, it entered Judaism as a result of external circumstances. It first appears as an important phenomenon during a series of national disasters; it continued through centuries of almost constant persecution and oppression. The despair generated by these circumstances made Jews receptive to the ascetic influences of medieval Christianity and Moslem Sufism, etc. The Talmud student in Abraham Reisen's Yiddish poem, *Mai Komashmo Lon*, complains that he must "slay this world and hope for the next." But the rest of the poem shows that his problem is not a world-denying philosophy of Judaism, but simple grim poverty. His boots are split, he lacks a warm winter coat, he doesn't get enough to eat. Could he find a wealthy patron or father-in-law, his Judaism would not condemn him for studying in physical comfort.

Rabbis saw both worlds as mutually dependent and indispensable. Therefore, they disapproved of flight from the world, whether by Jewish sectarians like the Essenes or by Christian ascetics. It was no doubt out of opposition to such trends that a third-century teacher declared, "Man will have to give account on judgment day for every harmless pleasure he denied himself."

Such advice may have been needed by the generation to which it was first delivered. It is unnecessary, and might even be misleading in the case of contemporary American Jewry, which seems committed to a pagan cult of enjoyment. This may be observed not only in the form of compulsive eating at resort hotels and Bar Mitzvah receptions, but, also, in the more elegant pleasures of Jewish esthetes. It is no accident that the arts have become a substitute for religion to many Jews. For, however great the demands made on the artist by his art, the "consumer" of the arts is under no pressure. He may read books, look at paintings, listen to music, and then go his way without further obligation. But Jewish religion in all of its versions requires commitment; it is not just to be enjoyed.

Time was, when substantial numbers of Jews were able to combine affirmation of this world with commitment to a transcendent purpose. This was accomplished not only through the customary forms of religion, but, also, by devotion to the Jewish socialist movement or to Zionism. Many whose philosophies were secular and materialistic were, in fact, committed to a sacred cause. The Jews of today have yet to find a method of combining a healthy this-worldliness with a sense of the transcendent. One ventures the guess that if such a way is found, it will involve some kind of recommitment to the practice of *mizvot*.



# *Religious Anxiety and the Experience of God*

MOSHE HALEVI SPERO

Dread is the possibility of freedom.  
--S. Kierkegaard

Happy is he who fears always; but he that hardens his heart shall fall into sin.  
--Proverbs 28:14

## I

THE EMOTIONS THAT ARE BY-PRODUCTS of, or concurrent with, religious practices, such as joy and happiness (*ivdu es ha-Shem b'simḥah*), awe (*v'yora'isa m'Elohekhā*), trembling (*re-addah*) and anxiety, are of great concern to both the theologian—who, by the definition of his trade, is concerned with the religious connotations of these psychological aspects of the human condition—and the psychologist—who is concerned with the psychological efficacy and potential therapeutic value of religious practices. Both the specialty which deals with the mundane factors of the human condition, if we can call mental health and balance mundane concerns, and the discipline which addresses itself to the so-called cosmic or transcendent factors of human life should be expected to share an intimate rapport in the arena of religious-emotional health and well-being. That there should be such a close inter-relationship between these two studies of man is dictated, in part, by the fact that the practice of religion is usually inextricably tied to a religionist's overall sense of being, balance and self-understanding and, in the long run, to his appreciation of his place in the cosmos.

Often, however, a detracting and obfuscatory wall has been imposed between theology and psychology on precisely this territory of the relation of religious practice, religious belief and the psychological analyses of them, the assumption being that each discipline has something of an impulse to eliminate the other. Theology, claim the unsympathetic psychologists, may inform about God, His essence and man's relation to Him, but self-understanding, or what is (and what is not) a psychologically healthy religious practice, is not truly within its domain. On the other hand, respond the theologians, while psychology may purport an understanding of the delicacies of man's internal mental balance or his interpersonal relationships, it tends to underestimate and underemphasize man's transcendent yearnings and religious potentials. Each, when facing the

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other in such sharply polarized positioning, accuses its fellow of oversimplification, reductionism and lack of sophistication.

The background from which this paper stems and from which its topics will be approached is one of a legitimate meeting-ground between both specialties which assumes that both the mundane, psychological needs, as well as the transcendent, religious ones of man are part of the general human condition. I further assume—and in so doing I suppose myself to be in the company of the modern existentially-oriented psychiatric community—that emotional understanding can provide the grounds from which religious growth can emerge and that, often, religious practices do much for man's overall psychic well-being and personality growth.<sup>1</sup> I think it would be safe to assert, from the standpoint of the history of ideas, that this was the tradition already anticipated and internalized by the Talmudic rabbis, by Martin Luther, Aquinas and Maimonides, as well as by the existential thinkers to be here discussed.

My interest here is to attempt an analysis of a certain type of religious experience, the *anxiety* following sin, in its capacity as an emotionally profound and healthy institution. I will then relate any conclusions in this regard to the larger issue of the philosophical justification of religious belief: specifically, the justification of the belief in the existence of God. I am interested here in far more than another attempt at reconciling modern psychiatry with the rabbinic musings of antiquity. Rather, what is at issue is whether or not certain religious experiences, *sui generis*, such as the very experience of having the idea of God in one's conceptual purview, point, in some way, to the verity of God's actual existence. This type of argument for the existence of God, based as it is on internal states of consciousness (*having an idea* of God, *feelings of reverence* towards God) rather than on external evidences from the real world, is known in philosophical circles as the Ontological Argument. Thus, if we can indicate that certain types of religious experience are not merely quirks of religionists' super-sensitive imaginations but are deeply ingrained aspects of the human condition, then, perhaps, we can bridge the span between individual religious experiences and the transcendent existence of the Being towards whom such phenomena are allegedly directed.

The sort of religious experience to be examined in some detail here is the emotional state of anxiety that is usually experienced with sin and the repentance which ensues, as viewed by the rabbis of the Talmud. As empiricists and pragmatists, after their own fashion, the rabbis of the Talmudic period often speculated about matters that were both universal as well as specifically Jewish in scope and many of their observations on human nature are still relevant for all mankind, especially some of their general psychological speculations, or what we today would probably consider psychology.<sup>2</sup> I will suggest here that they were keenly aware of

1. Moshe H. Spero, "Where Psychotherapy and Religion Meet," *Journal of Psychology and Judaism*, 1, 1 (1976).

2. Moshe H. Spero, "Anticipations of Dream Psychology in the Talmud," *Journal of the*

the role played by anxiety in the penitence process and that they held specific views on its potential constructivity and destructivity. My criteria for what will be considered "constructive" or "destructive" will be those assumed by the existentially oriented "psychologists," Søren Kierkegaard and later so-oriented psychologists. It will be from the conclusion that anxiety about sin, or religious anxiety, is actually an inherently constructive capacity, that I will attempt to shed light on a possible re-formulation of the ontological argument for the existence of God.

## II

Anxiety is a construct probably known to most readers as that emotional state presently infamous as being one of the most bothersome and potentially destructive conditions of modern man. Indeed, human existence has probably reached that point where day-to-day living is measured in terms of how much anxiety any activity, person, product or belief will cause and how much, in turn, will need to be expended in the removal of such anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Becker correctly notes that man has earned the title of the "hyperanxious animal,"<sup>4</sup> and Paul Tillich has even been able aptly to organize human history in terms of periods characteristic of certain types of prevalent anxieties.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the constant confusion which, in fact, permeates discussions of anxiety and of symptoms of mental maladjustment and religion, especially when such discussions center on biographies of religious innovators like Paul of Tarsus, Kierkegaard or Gandhi, is based, in part, on this very issue: is anxiety always nothing more than a state of mental illness or can it have independent, constructive aspects which transcend the scope of psychiatric diagnosis?<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, in order for our discussion of religious anxiety to steer as clear as possible from such confusion, I would distinguish first between the psychiatric and existential connotations of anxiety. As a psychological construct, anxiety differs from fear, an instinctive, automatic response, in that the former is, first, unique to man, and, second, that its source is usually vague and not objectifiable. This is so partly because even an apparently simple danger is rarely read by man automatically, apart from what he has learned in the past and from what he anticipates of the future.<sup>7</sup> Suffice it to say that, for psychology, anxiety is a signal of danger. However, if we view every human emotion as significant for being, as we do, then this last definition is greatly lacking in broad-range relevance.

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*History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 11, 4 (1975): 374-380.

3. Artistides, "Incidental Meditations," *American Scholar*, 45, 2 (1976): 173-179.

4. E. Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1974).

5. P. Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 41.

6. Moshe H. Spero, "Neurotic Conflict in the Religious Personality," *Journal of Applied Social Sciences*, 1, 1 (1976): 1-19.

7. S. Hiltner, "Psychiatric Theories of Anxiety," in S. Hiltner and K. Menninger, eds., *Constructive Aspects of Anxiety* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963), p. 47.

Such a cold, psychological definition of anxiety, while clearly useful to the practicing clinician, approaches man as a repository of behaviors rather than as man *qua* man struggling to find meaning-in-being. A meaningful understanding of anxiety, if it is ever to be seen as a religious experience, will need to be based on deeper conceptualizations. It is the existential connotation of anxiety which can be seen as satisfying such needs.

In the existential sense, *through anxiety one participates in life situations*. Those emotions or feelings which enable us to do so are existential in that they disclose special meanings of human *existence* in the situations wherein they are experienced. Also, such emotions have been termed "ontological," since they involve the basic self-affirmation of *being* in one's existence through such emotions. For example, the anxiety of death is, first, an existential one, grounded in the universal, intuitive awareness that all existants must someday die.<sup>8</sup> It is also ontological in that it is ultimately related to the way in which we experience being and our eventual non-being.

A far more important consideration which emerges from the formulation of human emotions as existential is that such an approach transcends ordinary psychological understandings of anxiety as being merely a symptom of mental unbalance.<sup>9</sup> Whereas a psychologist might speak of "having a feeling of anxiety or guilt," the existentialist speaks of "being anxious or guilty," for, in the latter's view, such emotions strike at the core of the individual's sense of being and of value as a person. Rather than construing them as *symptoms* or anomalous quirks of individual imbalance, we have here an understanding of emotions which views them as innate capacities and characteristics of man. This much is vital for any significant approach to religious emotional experience. There can be merit in speculation on the Talmudic, or any view of religious anxiety, only after one posits that anxiety, itself, can be seen as a disclosive property inherent in the natural human condition. Psychiatric symptoms, most would agree, are meaningful only on the individual level; they are indicative of deeper troubles which, by comparison, tend to make the symptom's own significance only secondary. Existential or, as we shall call it, religious anxiety, on the other hand, is itself an expression of human endeavor and is, in some way, a universal characteristic of human personality.

### III

Anxiety, as a religious phenomenon, got considerable attention from the Danish theologian, Kierkegaard, and it might be proper to mention a few relevant comments that are his personal contribution to the type of study which we are engaged in. While it is certainly true that Martin

8. Becker, *Op. cit.*

9. Tillich, *Op. cit.*; R. May, *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* (New York: Clarion Press, 1958), p. 50.

Heidegger had no small role in both the formulation of existentialism out of its precursor, phenomenology, and in the analysis of anxiety, his view will be by-passed here since it is a less constructive one than suits our discussion. For him, anxiety points always and only to the fact that man is not at home in this world and, ultimately, to man's basic *nothingness*. Since, for Heidegger, authentic existence calls only for the resolute acceptance of this very nothingness—and not for the acceptance of God—I am, perforce, less disposed to find his understandings helpful here.

Kierkegaard, on the other hand, made the following observation about anxiety which is, perhaps, the basis for all subsequent existentially-oriented views of anxiety and its relation to religious experience. For him, anxiety, whenever it surfaces in the existence of the religionist, points to the "dynamic dissatisfaction with the life of sin," and, in this capacity, he states that, "dread (anxiety) is the possibility of freedom."<sup>10</sup> For man, infinite possibility is always threatening, so that if he is ever tempted to grasp for infinity, he becomes scared at just that moment and grasps, instead, for finiteness. Similarly, in man's relation to God, there is the desire to live in faith and to trust in God for the security that man's finitude demands; yet, on the other hand, there is always the temptation to find security in finite things. Thus, as long as one experiences anxiety, one has a sign that one is a creature before God, wanting the proximity which, guiltily, we know that we often run from. The major idea here, then, is that anxiety always points to the *longing for God* and, as such, is the antithesis of a destructive, neurotic symptom of limited significance.

What also emerges is that we have been here exposed to an understanding of a simple emotion as a deeply religious experience with great meaning-for-being. If the reader will indulge me in one further digression, I would suggest that even by the strict definition of anxiety, at least as originally formulated in the works of Freud, we have a clue to the inherent *other-centeredness* of this emotion. After having indicated that anxiety, as conceived religiously, may, by its presence, point to the longing for God, can we also assert that the same is true psychodynamically, or from the strictly cold, psychological standpoint? I believe that we can. The root of all anxiety is the longing which we, as infants, experience in the mother's actual or feared absence.<sup>11</sup> All subsequent anxiety, even in adult life, appears to be a symbolic manifestation of this primitive longing for a loved person.<sup>12</sup> The key here is that the loved one's absence, actual or only feared, can be anxiety-provoking only if one already entertains prior feelings of love towards that object.<sup>13</sup> Even a child's or an adult's fear of punishment is best understood within the context of an anxiety over the possibility of being rejected for one's misdeeds.

10. S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread* and *The Sickness Unto Death*.

11. E. Berthold, *Fear of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) and Berthold, "Anxious Longing," in S. Hiltner, *Op. cit.*

12. S. Freud, *The Problem of Anxiety* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1936), pp. 56, 57, 59.

13. Berthold, *Op. cit.* and Hiltner, *Op. cit.*

What this points to is that even the psychological definition of anxiety entails prior assumptions of love and a subsequent longing for it. Thus, the anxiety following sin is more appropriately viewed not as being due to some sadistic conscience (super-ego) as evidenced, perhaps, in the apotheosis by other religions of monastic suffering.<sup>14</sup> Religious anxiety speaks of the search for reunion; our anxiety over God's possibly rejecting us also presupposes the creative impulse of love for God. This, perhaps, is the deeper significance of *t'shuvah* (return), the Hebrew for repentance. In the literal sense, *t'shuvah* has always been taken to mean our return to God and to *status quo* levels of religious behavior; in the more cosmic sense it implies, as noted here, our longing for union with God, for re-union after sin and for God's return to us. It is the sense of return implied by anxious longing, our anxiety thereby indicating our perception of the presence of God, which indicates, in turn, that religious growth has begun.

I read this also as being the implication of the *midrash* which states, "Return to Him half-way and He will meet you half-way."<sup>15</sup> I also suggest that several Tannaitic statements allude to what might have been an anticipation of this very emotionally constructive view of religious anxiety. For example:

Said R. Eliezer, "Return to God one day prior to the day of your death." The students of R. Eliezer thereupon asked him, "But does a man know the day of his death?" He answered, "Obviously not. But let man repent today and every day lest he die tomorrow and, thus, all his days will be spent in *t'shuvah*. Even did Solomon in his wisdom state, 'At all times let your garments be white.'"<sup>16</sup>

On one level, R. Eliezer asks man to repent for specific sins as soon as they are committed lest he be confronted by death unawares. The deeper significance, however, lies in the awareness that man must continually be in a state of confrontation with the existential anxiety over his eventual non-being and spiritual imperfection. King David expressed a similar sentiment: "And my sins are before me always."<sup>17</sup> Here again, since the rabbinic consensus is that lamentation over past sins—after due penitence is done and Yom Kippur has past—is unnecessary, David's called-for awareness must describe an existential awareness rather than a neurosis-promoting preoccupation with the myth of perpetual unforgivability.<sup>18</sup> This type of anxiety, as a state which motivates repentance, thereby attunes one to a sense of being and, in this sense, actually serves in a capacity hitherto reserved for pure reason.

Consider also the following account:

Said Reish Lakish: "Great is *t'shuvah* for it mitigates the gravity of intentional sins to that of accidental sins (*ones*)."<sup>19</sup> Yet did not Reish Lakish also say "Great

14. Noted by E. Fromm, *You Shall Be As Gods* (Conn.: Fawcett, 1966), pp. 132-133.

15. *P'sikta Rabbati* 45:9.

16. *Shabbos* 153a.

17. *Psalms* 51:5.

18. *Yoma* 86b and *Kiddushin* 40a.

is *t'shuvah* for it transforms intentional sins into meritorious acts"? He replied, "The former is the case by penitence motivated by fear alone, while the latter case applies to penitence motivated by the love of God."<sup>19</sup>

That is, neurotic fear or anxiety, the animalistic and non-other-related response to sin and the prospect of punishment, is not considered to be as wholesome or creative as is the deeper anxiety over sin which indicates a progressive longing for God. At the same time, one's initial experiences of loneliness during repentance must not lead to melancholia or withdrawal, but, rather, to the pursuit of God, much as the sense of loneliness during and following intensive psychotherapy is one step in the direction of personality growth.<sup>20</sup> In the Talmud's vintaged words, "Three things take away a man's strength: troubles, sins and fear . . . Why does a man have fear? Because his sins break his courage and he has no strength left." Yet, "All who sin and are made anxious are forgiven."<sup>21</sup> This anxiety, experienced with repentance, is also not different from the anguish often experienced with the emotionally-disclosive moment of "insight" which occurs during intensive therapy or with a probing self-analysis.

As a practical application, we might interpret the various afflictions which Jewish law requires that one submit to on Yom Kippur (the *Hamishah Iynuyim*: abstinence from eating, from washing, from marital relations, from donning leather shoes, and from anointment of the body) as mechanisms designed to bring us closer to the face of nothingness and non-being. It is as if we were attempting to simulate *in vivo* the "day of our death" as recommended by R. Eliezer, in order to increase our sensitivities and thereby further stimulate the repentance process. "Alone, shorn of all commitments, we confront our Maker. We own nothing, we can do nothing, we anticipate no pleasure. We are dead in the midst of life."<sup>22</sup> This notwithstanding, Yom Kippur is not a day for depression, but for seriousness and self-awareness. As Reb Shmelke of Nikolsboorg put it, "You know that the weeping on this day will not avail if there is sadness in it."<sup>23</sup> Rather, "A twinge in man's conscience is better than all the flogging he may receive."<sup>24</sup>

I conclude this part of the discussion by summarizing that anxiety is a religious experience and a creative endeavor both from the existential viewpoint, by virtue of the psychodynamic interpretation of anxiety, and as anticipated by the rabbinic statements noted above. The individual capacity to experience this sort of anxiety serves as the substantive material from which religious growth may emerge.

19. *Yoma* 86b; *Eruvin* 19a.

20. N. Ackerman, *The Psychodynamics of Family Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1958).

21. *Gittin* 70b; *Zohar*, Warsaw Ed. (1878), 202a; *Berakhot* 12b.

22. S. Spero, "In Search for the Real 'I'," *Jewish Observer*, 2, 4 (1965): 25.

23. S. Y. Agnon, *Days of Awe* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 207.

24. *Berakhot* 7a.



## IV

After these considerations, does this deeper analysis of anxiety *qua* religious experience of longing for God tell us anything more about the reality of God? We have seen that anxiety over sin is already rooted in a prior expectation and awareness of love for God—just as general anxiety presupposes an awareness of, and desire for, a “good,” the attainment of which is somehow threatened. Yet, whether the latter then proves that God, as the object of those emotions, does, in fact, exist, is a question which rightfully belongs to analyses of the validity of ontological arguments for the existence of God.

As stated at the outset, ontological arguments claim that religious experiences of certain sorts, or the very ability to experience the *idea* of God, would not be possible if God did not exist, so that, if we do have such experiences and ideations, God must exist. I have here argued that anxiety can be seen as one such *bona fide* religious experience which, *by its very nature*, points to an awareness of God. In truth, what are we really justified in saying about this awareness of anxiety; what does it reveal?

The positivistic argument, best exemplified by F. D. E. Schleiermacher's psychologizing of theology to death, if you will, runs as follows against both the use of religious experiences for evidence of the existence of God, as well as against religious experiences in general. Theological statements like “I experienced God's Presence,” reduce to three dogmatic formulations. They are either (1) statements about the world; (2) statements about God; or (3) statements about the religious individual's self-consciousness. In principle, Schleiermacher continues, statements (1) and (2) can always be either eliminated or reduced to statements of the third form. That is to say, God, His existence, or anything else about religious belief which we claim to know or to believe in, all reduce to statements about human consciousness. The objects of theology and religious belief, then, are figments of the religionist's imagination—or, at most, that is all one would be justified in calling them. To take this point further, Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics*, 1936), though personally opposed to Schleiermacher's patent reductionism, also argued that religious experiences, including religious anxiety, cannot be the basis for theological assertions since the analysis of religious experience tells us only about man and the workings of his consciousness and nothing about God. There is, then, no legitimate way from “our immanent experiences to a discovery of a transcendent God.”

Now, even Schleiermacher is correct to a degree, inasmuch as for many persons, such as the fanatically religious schizophrenic of popular stereotype, “religious experiences” point only, as far as we know, to that individual's aberrant mental conditions rather than to any actually inspired Divine visitations, let alone to actual Divine existence. On the other hand, we cannot rule from the specific few to the general cases of religious experience; we only assume, based on standard conceptions of reality as

we "know" it, that anyone first described as mentally ill cannot subsequently have his or her perceptions totally accepted as fact. Yet, no psychologist dare assert that he knows for sure that the internal experiences described by this schizophrenic person *cannot ever* possibly exist, nor that he can always clearly differentiate between true prophetic inspiration and mere hallucination or delusion. Similarly, one might argue, although the religious experiences which are claimed to point to the existence of God may, in fact, point only to man's fertile imaginative abilities, this does not prove *a fortiori* that God does not exist.

However, this means at best a draw or a stalemate, which is probably not the most desirable state of affairs for religious philosophical understanding. We have, in fact, John Wisdom's statement of the equivocal nature of such debates on religious matters:

A religious believer always shows that his belief implies no particular state of affairs which *experience can either confirm or disconfirm*; therefore, religious experiences (such as religious anxiety—MHS) or beliefs tell us nothing about why things should be this way or that or why this thing should exist or not exist.<sup>25</sup> (*italics added*)

On the other hand, Jewish philosophy has been shown to be closely compatible with valid ontological arguments and surely subscribes to the view that religious statements are both meaningful and justifiable.<sup>26</sup> For the late Abraham J. Heschel, the ontological presupposition—"an intuition of the Divine presence"—is not only valid grounds for affirming a belief in God, just as it was for Saadia and other mediaeval Jewish philosophers, but serves also as the vital basis for religious faith.<sup>27</sup> As for H. A. Wolfson's view that "the entire idea of the knowledge of God as an innate idea is absent in Judaism,"<sup>28</sup> S. Spero argues quite clearly to the contrary, and his point of view is made especially strong with the following citation:

Said Rabbi Akiba: "By a special love man is *informed* that he was created in the image of God." Perhaps man is informed by an immediate awareness that he is a creature of God (recall Kierkegaard's formulation of this idea, noted earlier—MHS.), for surely not all men have access to the Torah. We find this precise point made in the *Shir Hayihud* . . . "Thou hast planted within him the knowledge of God, because thou hast created him in the image of God."<sup>29</sup>

My intention here is not to terminate the discussion with an appeal to authority in favor of my perhaps obvious philosophical leanings. My purpose is to suggest a view of anxiety which might be seen as a stronger

25. J. Wisdom, "Gods," in J. Margolis, ed., *An Introduction to Philosophical Inquiry* (New York: Knopf, 1968).

26. S. Spero, "The Justification of Religious Belief," *Tradition*, 13, 1 (1971).

27. A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 171.

28. H. Wolfson, "Notes on Proofs of the Existence of God in Jewish Philosophy," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1924, pp. 582-583.

29. S. Spero, "Judaism and the Ontological Argument," *JUDAISM*, 14, 1 (1965): 44.

sort of religious experience upon which to base an ontological evidence for God's existence. One might argue, if anxiety presupposes the love for an object, that object must exist—especially *since existential anxiety is not merely an abnormal state of affairs but is, rather, a deeply rooted response of man's natural condition*.<sup>30</sup> And I would buttress this suggestion with an interesting philosophical maneuver proposed in support of the ontological argument and particularly credible in view of the central thesis here. It has been said that, if we look at nature, we find no living organism possessed of a basic need or vital organismic thirst which, *in principle*, cannot be quenched: those animals that need water live near water, those that need meat live near areas where meat is available.<sup>31</sup> The so-called natural plan seems to allow for little error in this ecological arrangement. Similarly, inasmuch as we now understand anxiety as being part of man's *normal* behavior potentials, I would argue that if man does thirst for God, as evidenced in part by the presupposition of his anxiety, then, *in principle*, this thirst, too, must be satiable through the acquisition of the actual object of that thirst. Hence: the existence of God; Q. E. D.

Of course, even this is probably not an unassailable argument; few are. For anxiety, if we were to be precise, and even given our existential predilections, merely points to an other, but not necessarily to God's, actual existence. Anxiety indicates longing for an other—be it mother or God—whose existence is assumed *prior* to the first manifestation of anxiety; they are there already to be anxious over. Thus, it would seem as if anxiety in its own right cannot substantiate the existence of God, only that if one already accepts the fact of God's existence, a show of anxiety may indicate the additional factor of that individual's love for God. This, in fact, is all that Kierkegaard argues for. Perhaps this dilemma is what our "basic thirst" argument, noted earlier, comes to remove. Still, it would seem as if, for the "basic thirst" analogy to carry-through completely, we should need proof that anxiety's first encounter is with God, which does not seem to be the case.

Be this as it may, there is still little doubt that the experience of anxiety serves in a capacity which Rudolph Bultmann once termed the

30. Pursuant to this point, D. G. Atfield notes that "There is nothing necessarily in the association of alleged experiences of God with certain conditions found in infancy or in brain chemistry or in social need to require the conclusion that the latter *produce* or *generate* the religious experiences. To assume that such an interpretation is preferable to saying simply that certain psychological conditions *accompany* the spiritual dimension . . . may be merely to bring in and take for granted the dogma of metaphysical materialism . . . Only when an experience is priorly known to be hallucinatory is the explanation of the whole experience sought in the subject's psychology . . . Granted normal human confidence that by perception an experience is in touch with the real physical world, perception is held to be mainly veridical . . . until rebuttal is made." ("The Argument from Religious Experience," *Religious Studies*, 11, 3 [1975]: 335-343; 340).

31. E. A. Burtt, *Types of Religious Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), p. 123. Cook Wilson (in N. Smart, *Historical Selections in the Philosophy of Religion* [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], pp. 440-463), also holds that the ontological argument can be validly grounded in the unique human capacity to experience *reverence* towards God.

“prior understanding” of religious experience.<sup>32</sup> He argues that the religious individual must have some prior understanding of the very concept of God before Revelation can occur. This innate idea of God cannot give one a clear conceptualization, however, just as the actual word of God does not tell us exactly the same thing that we understood for ourselves on the basis of our experiences. This, I would dare say, is why it was held that “greater is he who is commanded and performs a commandment than he who is not, and performs the commandment.”<sup>33</sup> The idea there is that there is a qualitative difference between what a man may intuit on his own and what the actual word of God reveals about that intuition.

One must similarly have a prior understanding of good, evil, death, guilt and forgiveness before the *D’var Elohim* can be internalized. When the Revelation finally occurs, it is something and *of* something that one could not imagine; but, at the same time, if, when revelation occurs, one would have had no prior experience or understanding of it, one would have been lacking in *actual* understanding of the Revelation.

The notion of a prior understanding of God simply suggests that God reaches us in and through the created world and our experience of it. It is the sense in which *we all desire for God* and, even prior to Revelation, something inside us gnaws away in His absence. In this sense also, I suggest, Abraham, according to the *midrash*, “found” God prior to his first encounter with the Divine; our deep yearnings drive us to approximate the Ultimate Encounter as best as our limitations allow. It is in this pre-existent receptiveness that God approaches man in dialogue.

## V

The ontological argument for the existence of God and the very route from religious experience to an objective verification of God’s transcendent existence, are aspects of Jewish philosophy and theology whose analysis and application surely deserve continuous study. I have suggested here that certain natural human emotions—specifically, anxiety—serve in a capacity which points directly to the ultimate other-centeredness of the Jewish believer, to his inherent potential to experience God as *Thou*. If, in addition, this thesis can aid our attempts to bridge the distance between religious experience and philosophical evidence for the existence of God—which, our philosophical frustrations notwithstanding, we accept on faith in either case—we might also fulfill our religious requirements to justify religious belief. Perhaps, in this manner, John Wisdom’s assertion that religious belief tells us “nothing about why things should be this way rather than that” might be reserved for some other belief systems, but not held applicable to Judaism.

32. R. Bultmann, *Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 225; 130-133.

33. *Kiddushin* 31a.

# *A Battered People Syndrome?*

S. LEVIN

"A STUDY COVERING THREE GENERATIONS OF families of abused children supports the themes that violence breeds violence and that a child who experiences violence as a child has a potential of becoming a violent member of society in the future."<sup>1</sup>

How true or how inevitable such a warped fate is we do not know. The first generation of battered babies—those specifically labelled with this term—are only now entering adulthood. It may well be that the consequences of battering are comparable to the sequelae of a lack of infantile stimulation and a lack of love, in which case the child so starved may grow up into an adult unable to give love, the "hollow man" as Selma Fraiberg<sup>2</sup> has labelled the disorder. However, if favorable conditions arise it may be that a battered baby could yet grow up into a decent and kindly adult. Nevertheless, in the present state of knowledge, where almost every case history of a parent battering a child reveals that the parent, too, was once an abused child, it would not be incorrect to claim that, at a clinical level, battered babies tend to become battering and violent adults.

What, then, should we say about this people Israel, battered as no other, bruised as no other? Are the Children of Israel, in turn, a battering people? But is there an analogy between a child and this people Israel? Can we pursue any kind of valid comparison? I think we can. The concept of Israel in a sonship relationship to a parent-God has been so early and so well developed as to constitute the closest analogy to a real parent-child relationship. At our inception as a nation we were immediately introduced to the parental connection: "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7). This relationship has been expressed in terms of husband and wife but, especially, in a parent-child context:

Israel is my son, my firstborn (Exodus 4:22).

You are the children of the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 14:1).

God who brought you to birth. . . his own sons and daughters (Deuteronomy 32:18-20).

. . . my sons . . . thou art our father (Isaiah 63:8,16).

You called me Father (Jeremiah 3:4).

How gladly would I treat you as a son . . . You shall call me Father (Jeremiah 3:19).

Is Ephraim my dear son, a child in whom I delight? As often as I turn my

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1. L.B. Silver, C.C. Dublin and R.S. Lourie. "Does Violence Breed Violence?" *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 126 (1969): 152.

2. S. Fraiberg, "The Origins of Human Bonds," *Commentary*, (Dec. 1967):47.

back on him I still remember him; and so my heart yearns for him, I am filled with tenderness towards him (Jeremiah 31:20).

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. (Hosea 11:1).

As far as Jews are concerned, God is not only in heaven but also very near, part of the household, a member of the family, to be addressed lovingly and tenderly. Yiddish has a particularly intimate and endearing expression for a father, *tattenyu*, and a mother, *mammenyu*, and for God, *Gottenyu*, a word really untranslatable into a language in which a son can address his own father as "Sir." One must be a Jew and feel a Jew in order to appreciate the flavor of such expressions. When Israel dons *tefillin*, he wears within them the most emphatic attachment to the Father: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone." In what must surely be the sweetest and most tender sentiment in all of the Gemarah, we learn that God also wears *tefillin*, and within his is written, according to Rabbi Hiya bar Avin, a line from 1 Chronicles 17:21, "Who is like your people Israel, a nation unique on earth!" (Berahot 6a).

And lo, this is a battered people, described with prophetic insight: "From head to foot there is not a sound spot on you; nothing but bruises and wheals and raw wounds which have not felt compress or bandage or soothing oil" (Isaiah 1:6). For millennia, this child Israel has been tormented like no other. Israel is the archetypal battered child and here is the paradox: this Israel is neither a battering adult nor an abusive neighbor but a charitable and non-violent people, a characteristic that few would dispute. Especially remarkable is the extraordinary forbearance and humanity in the face of extreme provocation and persecution and the lack of hatred among Jews in Israel for the Arabs seeking repeatedly to destroy them. Suffice it to quote a Christian scholar of the history of religions, the late S.G.F. Brandon of Manchester University: Jews "are by nature a just and peaceable people."<sup>3</sup>

So what is wrong with the theory? If the analogy of Israel as a battered child is valid, why is Israel not a battering adult? Is the analogy invalid because the battering does not come from God but from the neighbor? No, such a view is secular, and the religious Jew and the religious outlook during the past millennia must have imputed the torments to God who, right at the beginning, spoke of "O Assyrian, rod of my anger! . . . author alike of prosperity and trouble. I, the Lord, do all these things" (Isaiah 10:5, 45:7). And the unchanged response of the religious Jew must have been that of Levi Isaac of Berdichev: "What is your case against your people Israel? Why have you burdened your people with afflictions?"

So why is Israel a compassionate and pacific people? It's a puzzle, and a suggested answer involves, firstly, a rather lengthy digression on explanations of evil, especially undeserved evil, in God's world. If man

3. S.G.F. Brandon, "Jerusalem, A.D. 70." *History Today* XX (1970): 814.



posits a Father-God and, moreover, a good God, good as we generally understand the term, then there are only three, or even two ways of explaining evil, and however sophisticated is the argument presented it is always reducible to these two or three categories.

1. To deny, minimize or excuse evil. This mechanism is developed to its most grotesque conclusion within Christian Science. Since a good God, by definition, cannot be the author of evil, then evil cannot exist. It must be an illusion, a wrong attitude, a false manner of thinking, a figment. Though we may not understand it, God's inscrutable ways are all for the good. Within Judaism there are also minor tendencies in this direction, modelled on the father-child connection: "I'm punishing you for your own good." "Those whom he loves the Lord reproves, and he punishes a favorite son" (Proverbs 3:12). *Hakol letovah*—everything is for the best. The funeral service, no matter how tender the child, how tragic the death, includes a thought from Deuteronomy 32:4 "The Rock, His work is perfect." In the context of centuries of horrendous anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust, such a pronouncement is surely obscene.<sup>4</sup>

2. If one postulates a good God one can also invoke an anti-God, Satan, and this is the explanation for evil featured within early Persian religion and within Gnosticism and Christianity and which also, usually in disguised form, appears within some Jewish notions. These may be as obvious as the mini-satans, the *shedim*, demons, which are alleged to afflict man, or as obscure as the unregenerate evil consequent on the Cabbalistic teaching of *zimzum*, divine withdrawal from areas of the universe, with these areas, that are untouched by divine illumination, manifesting an almost Satanically autonomous evil. Evil is as much a part of the universe as good: "If we accept good from God, shall we not accept evil?" (Job 2:10). The evil inclination in man, created by God, is good and essential for human welfare (*Bereshit Rabbah* 9:9).<sup>5</sup> This whole category is really part of the third, the explanation involving divine limitation.

3. The God with limits is not found in Christianity or Islam but is a uniquely Jewish concept. Most typically, Judaism excuses God's culpabil-

4. This category of explanation, that the ways of God are mysterious and inscrutable (e.g. Isaiah 55:9), and ultimately for the good, and that we must trust that God has a plan and knows what he is doing, is especially well articulated in the Book of Job. God is simply not to be questioned on this point: "I will not be inquired of by you!" (Ezekiel 20:3). Modern arguments are unchanged; see R. Gordis, "A Cruel God or None—Is There No Other Choice?" in JUDAISM, XXI, 3 (Summer 1972):283/4: "It becomes possible, even in the most brutal of centuries, to believe that there is meaning and plan in the universe, even if it is far less neat and pleasant than we would wish . . . the Messianic Age of justice, freedom and peace will not be ushered in without pain and destruction." A similar view will be found in Gordis' essay "The Lord out of the Whirlwind," JUDAISM, XIII, 1 (Winter 1964):48-63 and in his book, *A Faith For Moderns*, (New York: Bloch Pub. Co., 1960), pp. 162-173.

5. In addition to offering the Joban explanation that the ways of God are inscrutable and that there is a larger plan in the universe, Gordis also admits this second category of defect in God's explanation to Job (40:9-14): "Here is a moving acknowledgment by God that the world order is not perfect . . . Thus God has conceded that there are flaws in the picture—evil which He has not conquered . . . The evil is not dismissed as illusory or unimportant." (from "The Lord out of the Whirlwind," *loc. cit.*:50). It is revealing that Gordis uses the word conquered, God needing to battle the adversary evil.



ity for evil on the grounds that He was somehow uninvolved in its perpetration, and this within the paradox of omnipotence and omnipresence. This argument must necessarily place some kind of limits to God, limits which, in extreme form, and taken to a possible logical conclusion, deny the existence of God altogether. Hence, this kind of explanation, although Jewish, has never been well articulated. Curiously, there is ample Biblical basis for invoking a God who is unconcerned, inactive or perhaps even absent, as in the form of the charge against Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:27); perhaps God is sleeping and needs to be awakened:

My tears have been my food day and night while all day they ask me, Where is your God? (Psalm 42:4, 11).

Bestir thyself Lord; why dost thou sleep? (Psalm 44:24).

What does God know? The Most High neither knows nor cares (Psalm 73:11).

And there are other opinions in this vein: Psalms, 14:1, 53:1, 94:7; Jeremiah 5:12; Ezekiel 8:12, 9:9; Zephaniah 1:12. But the passage of two millennia has seen no elaboration on these profound questions except, possibly, a passing Talmudic jibe at the view of *Les din veles dayan*—there is no divine law and no divine Judge (*Shabbat* 112b, *Eruvin* 24a). Scripture even suggested an answer, invoking a concept of a deity whose attention is temporarily diverted, *histir panav* (Psalm 10:11), he hid his face (turned his face, according to Dahood, in the Anchor Bible); *lama panekha tastir?* why do you hide your face? (Psalm 44:25); *Ata el mistater*, you are a hiding God, says Isaiah (45:15).

During the ensuing centuries this idea lay fallow while the Cabbalists diverted the expression *El mistater* to refer to the Unknowable God, the *Deus absconditus*, The First Cause, *Ein sof*, the Infinite. Only in the wake of the Holocaust, and in this increasingly secular age, with God increasingly irrelevant in human affairs, has the original *El mistater* concept again begun to appear in Jewish thought.<sup>6</sup>

At least a partial answer is supplied in the concept of *El mistater*; it permits continuing faith despite evil, hope for a God of compassion temporarily hiding His face, and it protects the integrity of the God on whom it would be intolerable to place the blame for undeserved human suffering. From Job, who trusted his father-God despite his afflictions, to

6. Martin Buber, in a reference to Job, invokes God "hiding his face" (*The Prophetic Faith* [New York: Harper & Row, 1949], p. 191), while M. Rosensaft relates the tale of the Hasidic rebbe at Auschwitz who said that "if the *ribono shel olam* should open his window now and look down here and see Auschwitz, he would close the window again and say I did not do this." ("Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future," JUDAISM, XVI, 3 [Summer 1967]:294.) Eliezer Berkovitz writes, with reference to *hester panim*, hiding the divine face, "If man is to act on his own responsibility, without being overawed by divine supremacy, God must absent himself from history." (*Faith After the Holocaust* [New York: KTAV, 1973], p. 107). Is this not a linear road to Richard L. Rubenstein's conclusion that after Auschwitz all that is left of divinity is a kind of holy "Nothingness"? Like Berkovitz, R. Gordis writes: "The major ills afflicting human life—war, poverty and, in large measure, disease—are not the

Wiesel<sup>7</sup> who insists on his faith in the face of the Holocaust, God the father is there and yet not there when the blows fall. An obligatory theist, the Jew is at the same time a tender atheist, shielding his father from accusations of battering. No, father was not responsible; he was not there at the time; he was in hiding.

To return to the main theme: A battered child, then, who grows up to be not a battering adult but a kind and gentle person must, in the experience of Israel, deny his father's blows and shield him from accusations. Somehow he was absent, not his true self inflicting the pain. This is a theory that one could suggest in relation to battered children. There are children, illtreated by parents, who still prefer their painful home to the desolation of a non-hurtful orphanage, and there are also children who, as they grow older, progressively deny the violence of their parents. How common this is we do not know; documentation is rare or absent, personal impressions more common.<sup>8</sup> Battered children are mostly less than five years old and with increasing age it becomes difficult to remember what happened before the age of five. Evidence for past assaults and tortures becomes increasingly hearsay and some growing children tend to deny the extent and severity of the parent-inflicted pains of the past. To affirm parental battering and reject battering parents, is to prefer the orphanage and opt for orphan status,<sup>9</sup> as intolerable a situation for a child as for a community or people. One imagines that a certain proportion of battered children will, in the course of time, minimize or excuse their battering parents—they hid their face while the blows fell—but on this point documentation is scanty, if present at all. However, based on the non-violent behaviour of a battered child-people, we can posit a hypothesis that a battered child, should he grow up to be a gentle and considerate person, will have adopted the Jewish mechanism of *El mistater* in relation to his battering parents: he will find an excuse for them and defend them.

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will of God but the act of man . . . Consequently, not God, but man, can stamp them out. . . " ("A Cruel God or None," *loc cit.*: 282).

A Christian, Hans O.Tiefel, carefully demonstrates that all arguments purporting to explain unmerited evil in a good God's world are faulty, and he concludes that we are, therefore, asking the wrong questions. Without letting us know what is the right question, he draws on his Christian faith, centered in the Incarnation, to suggest an answer to the unasked riddle, and his answer is a hint that the repeatedly crucified Israel is none other than God; that God suffers with Israel ("Holocaust Interpretations and Religious Assumptions," JUDAISM, XXV, 2 [Spring 1976]:135). This, too, is not an original idea; there are hints in our Scriptures on these lines and the Talmud (B. *Megillah* 29a) states that when Israel was exiled, the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence, also went into exile. The conclusion of Tiefel's answer is well within the category of the God of limitations; He cannot help the suffering of His people and elects to participate in them.

7. Thus, Elie Wiesel writes, "I believe that God is part of our experience. The Jew, in my view, may rise against God, provided he remains within God . . . *Af al pi chen velamrot hakol* . . . Jewish we shall be nevertheless, despite Your will." ("Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future," JUDAISM, XVI 3, [Summer 1967]:298-299). How like a Joban (13:15) pronouncement: *Hen Yikteleni, lo ayahel, akh d'rakhai el panav okhiah*—Let him slay me, I will not hesitate; I should still argue my cause to his face.

8. Thus, Bethesda, Md. psychiatrist H. Stierlin, reports that "even in families with battered children I have become impressed with the battered victim's frequent loyalty to, and bound-upness with, his parental batterers" (*History of Childhood Quarterly*, 1(1974):584.

9. S. Levin, "The Orphan Syndrome," JUDAISM, XXII, 1 (Winter 1973):33.

# *The Covenant—The Leap of Huzpah*

BRUCE S. WARSHAL

## I

JEWISH TRADITION HAS RECOGNIZED at least two covenants between man and God. The first covenant in time, in the sense of Biblical chronology, was God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 9). Upon this foundation Talmudic Judaism enunciated the seven Noahide laws expressing God's basic relationship to all mankind. The second covenant recognized by the tradition is God's special relationship to the Jewish people through His promises to the patriarchs, culminating in the Sinaitic revelation. However, the tradition fails to distinguish yet a third covenant, one which clearly emerges from the second, proclaiming a different relationship between God and the Jewish people; in fact, a covenant which is not a factual one but uses covenant language to establish a new theology. This third covenant will be discussed in Part III; but to understand fully the radical approach of this third covenant, the nature of the concept of covenant must be reviewed (Part II). Finally (in Part IV), we will discuss the kind of covenant that Jews today must choose, which entails the basic question of the value of the covenant in contemporary Jewish theology.

## II

We have so elevated the word "covenant" that we forget that it means merely contract, and is still found in standard legal forms: "the party of the first part and the party of the second part do hereby covenant, contract and agree, to wit . . ." After this introduction the lawyer inserts the price to be paid and/or the service to be rendered. What we forget is that God was the party of the first part, rendering a service to the Jewish people and demanding payment in return, in that particular contract, payment in kind, i.e., payment in services. Our covenant was not a lofty concept, but, rather, was a practical contractual arrangement. To understand this, three points of law that are common to all legal systems must be discussed.

First, to have a valid contract or covenant you must have a *quid pro quo*, a this for that. There must be consideration, which is a legal term indicating that each party must provide a service or money in return for the

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other party's service or money. If there is no consideration, if one party is offering while the other is not offering in return, but is merely receiving, then we have not a contract, but a gift.<sup>1</sup> If *A* promises a gift to *B* and then changes his mind, *B* cannot hold *A* to his promise, for *B* promised nothing in return. He does not have a contract on which to sue. In the case of God and the Jews there was a valid contract, a covenant, which clearly spelled out the obligations of both parties. The Torah is replete with references to this contract. God, as the party of the first part, will cause the Jewish people to prosper, will give it a land of milk and honey, will make it a father of a multitude of nations and will protect it from its enemies. The people of Israel, as the party of the second part, will repay God by acting like a nation of priests, by following God's laws, by not killing, by honoring father and mother, by adhering to the 613 commandments incumbent upon the people. There is no gift here. The contract is evident. Both sides understand their obligations.

Legal point number two: To have a valid contract there must be equality of bargaining. If *A* holds a gun to *B*'s head and forces him to sign a contract, that contract will not be enforced by the courts, for *B* was under duress and surely did not have equal bargaining power to formulate the terms and obligations of the contract. Another more common example may illustrate this point. The courts will not hold a minor to his contract. It is felt that, because of his tender age, a minor, by definition, does not have equal bargaining power with an adult. It takes an adult to contract with an adult.<sup>2</sup>

But what does it take to contract with God? Where is, or how can there be, equal bargaining power with God? Do we then have a valid covenant or contract? We have all heard of the leap of faith (if I may borrow a Protestant phrase), but such a leap has always been present in Judaism. Few people realized that, inherent in the covenant or contract, there is another leap. I call it the leap of *huzpah*, and this concept is a Jewish gift to the world.

The *huzpah* is inherent in a contract with God, not a gift from God, mind you, but a contract with obligations on both sides. With heart and mind full of *huzpah*, the people who wrote the Torah pulled themselves up to confront God as equals, to strike a bargain, to write a contract, to put God and His obligations on paper as well as putting the people Israel and its obligations on the printed line.

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1. Ancient Jewish law clearly required consideration. Rabbi Menachem Elon, Professor of Jewish Law and Director of the Institute for Research in Jewish Law of the Hebrew University has written that, "Jewish law attaches a great deal of importance to the existence of consideration in the creation of contractual ties, and in this respect shows an interesting similarity to English law." For an extensive discussion on this see Menachem Elon, ed., *The Principles of Jewish Law* (Jerusalem, 1975) pp. 247ff.

2. Directly paralleling Anglo Saxon law (historically speaking, setting the pattern for Anglo Saxon law) ancient Jewish law estopped the minor from contractual obligations, thereby protecting him from exploitation. A minor (classified with an idiot and deaf-mute, for the same reason of lack of equal bargaining power) could not lose control of his property by contract (*BM* 22b, *Git.* 59a). See also article by Haim Cohn in M. Elon, *Op. cit.*, p. 574.

It may be protested that a reading of the Torah clearly indicates that those who wrote it understood that man was subservient to, and not the equal of, God. This is absolutely true, but, more important, throwing Aristotelian logic aside (after all, this precedes Aristotle by 600 years), by ignoring the contradiction, or by merely not seeing such a contradiction, the writers also proclaimed the worth of the people to confront God as equal, to strike a bargain with the Almighty.<sup>3</sup>

This leap of *hūzpah* tells us something about the ancient Jewish concept of the worth of man. An inherently evil man could in no way gain the stature needed to write the contract with God. Although the word "contract" is less lofty than "covenant," the idea inherent in contract, the equality of bargaining with equal contractual obligations, raises mankind to a truly lofty position. Likewise, man's self-image, inherent in the leap, requires of him to act with Godly attributes in order to meet his contractual obligations. How much more rewarding is this concept of man and his responsibilities than assuming that all is a gift of God, leaving mankind to receive, even to emulate, but without the dignity of knowing that it is an equal party to mutual obligation.

Legal point number three: A covenant or contract, by its nature, is capable of being broken or cancelled by either party to such contract.<sup>4</sup> It can be mutually dissolved or, more important to our discussion, if one party does not meet its obligations, does not render its service to the other party, the second party is not obliged to fulfill its promise, its obligations to the contract. This point was eminently clear to the ancient Jews, to the writers of the Torah. If you follow my laws, God proclaims, then I meet my obligations to you, but if the people Israel does not meet its contractual obligations, does "not observe all these commandments . . . If you break my covenant" (Lev. 26:14, 15) then "I will spurn you" (Lev. 26:30). God will no longer feel the need to fulfill his obligations under the contract.

This is precisely what the pre-exilic literary prophets, what Isaiah, Micah, Amos, and Hosea, were saying. You, the people Israel, are sin-

3. It can be said that the ancient Jewish writer was a practitioner of holistic thinking, where something is both true and untrue at the same moment. Abraham Maslow has written:

It is extremely important, however, even crucial, to give up our 3,000-year-old habit of dichotomizing, splitting and separating in the style of Aristotelian logic, ("A and Not-A are wholly different from each other, and are mutually exclusive. Take your choice—one or the other. But you can't have both.") Difficult though it may be, we must learn to think holistically rather than atomistically. All these "opposites" are in fact hierarchically-integrated, especially in healthier people, and one of the proper goals of therapy is to move from dichotomizing and splitting toward integration of seemingly irreconcilable opposites.

*Toward A Psychology of Being*, [Princeton, N.J. 1962] p. 164). Certainly the classic holistic thought in Judaism is Akiba's comment in *Pirke Avot* that "All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given."

4. The simple statement that a contract by its nature is capable of being broken or cancelled by either party to such a contract, although manifest that it is true in ancient Jewish law, is most difficult to footnote succinctly. The problem is that Jewish law did not enunciate broad principles but, rather, applied them in specific cases. This difficulty applies even to a generic term for the word contract. See Elon, *Op. cit.*, p. 246. For this principle of law as applied to specific kinds of contracts see Shmuel Shilo, in Elon, *Op. cit.*, p. 266; Shmuel Revital, in Elon, *Op. cit.*, p. 280; and Aaron Kirschenbaum, pp. 307-309.

ning. You are oppressing the poor. You are distorting justice. You are not meeting ritual obligations under the covenant. The result of this breach of contract can only be that God will forsake the Jewish people. The prophets did not take God's largesse for granted. They understood the conditional nature of the relationship. They predicted that God would destroy the people, for it was clear to them that the people had defaulted on the contract.

The test of true prophecy was met: the destruction came. The northern empire (Israel) fell in 721 B.C.E., and the southern nation (Judah) collapsed in 586 B.C.E., with the Temple in ruins and the people in Babylonian exile. It would appear that the file was closed, the contract negated, and the chosen people no longer chosen.

### III

Enters a new historical concept promulgated by the post-exilic prophets. They proclaim that Israel still possesses a covenant with God, that such a contract is a *brit olam*, an eternal covenant, and Israel's obligation under such covenant or contract is to spread monotheism, to be an *or la-goyim*—a light unto the nations, to use the terminology of Second Isaiah.<sup>5</sup>

The very words *brit olam*, an eternal, never-ending contract or covenant, is a contradiction in terms. A contract, by its nature, must be conditional on the two parties fulfilling their obligations. A *brit* to be a *brit*, a covenant to be a covenant or a contract can never be never-ending, incapable of being cancelled. An eternal covenant is a logical impossibility. It becomes, in its nature, a gift, an irreversible gift.

It is true, as mentioned above, that the ancient Jew did not necessarily follow logical constructs; but if we, as modern Jews, are to relate to our heritage we must confront this impossibility. This is not to say that logical constructs should necessarily govern religion. There must be room for a healthy belief in the non-rational, in the sense of faith predominating over reason. There must also be the recognition that two irreconcilable religious thoughts can be holistically internalized within one human being. But the distinction in the *brit olam*, the eternal contract, is that we have a contradiction within *one* religious concept, that the concept itself stands confused. It is one thing to profess a faith in a whole *ideatum* even if it is unprovable by rational thought, or to internalize two irreconcilable posi-

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5. This does not imply that there was not a continuous reformulation of the original *brit*. Amos may well have assumed a wilderness relationship, which required ethical comportment and fidelity to Yahveh, to the exclusion of a cultic relationship as later formulated in Deuteronomy. The next formulation of the *brit* includes an external covenant with Aaron. What is important is that no matter what form the formulation of original contract takes, it is dependent upon conditional contract law explicated in Part II of this paper. The third, or new, post-exilic covenant drops this crucial assumption, as will be discussed herein in Part III.



tions, but it is quite another thing to profess a faith in a concept that is not whole, that carries internal confusion.

The notion of the *brit olam* as a new covenant, as changing God's relationship to the Jewish people, is not manifest because the post-exilic prophets did their work so well. Rather than inventing new terminology, they borrowed the very words *brit olam* from Torah, while changing the basic meaning of that phrase.<sup>6</sup>

It is exceedingly significant that the confusing phrase *brit olam* should be noted for its relative absence in Torah. If Numbers and Leviticus are contemporaneous with the post-exilic prophets (see Footnote 6) we are left with only five references to that phrase, four in Genesis and one in Exodus. Leviticus and Numbers contribute three more references. All of these must be discussed in order to appreciate the fine craftsmanship of the post-exilic prophets.

The context of Leviticus 24:7-8 is the establishment of Aaronide priestly power:

With each row you shall place pure frankincense, which is to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering by fire to the Lord. He [Aaron in the Tent of Meeting] shall arrange them before the Lord regularly every Sabbath day—it is a commitment for all time [*brit olam*] on the part of the Israelites.

Here we have the establishment of the obligations and, of course, the power, of Aaron and his sons, emanating from their functions in the Temple ritual. The *brit olam* that is present is not the concept of an eternal covenant as expressed by the post-exilic prophets (later to be discussed in this paper) but is, in its most crass expression, a declaration of inherited power to continue generation after generation. To be sure, in some sense there is an eternal, never-ending, not-capable-of-being-broken, nature to this arrangement; but the focus is not on *the* covenant, on the relationship between God and the people Israel. There are two other Aaronide cultic references using the term *brit olam*. Numbers 18:19 speaks of an everlasting salt offering, which has reference to Leviticus 2:13, prescribing that salt must be mixed with all meal offerings. Numbers 25:13 refers to a *brit kehunot olam*—a pact of priesthood forever, again referring to priestly empire building.

Exodus 31:16 states: "The Israelite people shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout the generations as a covenant for all time" (*brit olam*). The context is clear that there is the hope that Israel's fidelity to God will never end. What is not stated here is the reverse, that

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6. To say that the post-exilic prophets "borrowed" the terminology of Torah may connote that Leviticus and Numbers predate the post-exilic prophets, which is not my intent. The dating of these books is not within the scope of this paper. (See Ellis Rivkin, *The Shaping of Jewish History* [New York, 1971], Chapter II). The important point is that the post-exilic prophets built upon an existing Torah tradition, which, at their time, is, at least, firmly rooted, in Genesis and Deuteronomy.



God will be bound forever to the people. A hope of fidelity cannot be construed into an eternal covenant, no matter that the terminology is *brit olam*.

This brings us to the four remaining references. Clearly, in Genesis 9:16, there is an eternal promise binding God's actions forever. God promises to Noah and his sons that never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth, and sets the rainbow in the clouds as a visual reminder of His "everlasting covenant" (*brit olam*). Here there is an eternal promise by God, whether that promise constitutes a contract or no. But note that the promise is made to mankind, not to Jews; this particular promise forms the basis of the Noahide laws, not of the Sinaitic covenant. It was always disjunctive and never conjunctive with the establishment of the *brit*, of the concept of the chosen people.

The final three references are in Genesis, Chapter 17, verses 7, 13 and 19. It can be argued that even though the phrase *brit olam* is used here, there is an actual consideration given by the people, that consideration being the requirement to express the covenant through the ritual of circumcision; yet, that is certainly far less than the requirements of the contract as generally understood, binding the Jewish people to a voluminous set of obligations.

Although the phrase *brit olam* is occasionally used in Torah, there is nowhere in evidence the kind of full-blown concept of eternal covenant, later expressed in terms of *or la-goyim* or Israel's mission. Before the post-exilic prophets, when the term *brit* is used, the tradition referred to a conditional contract with God that had inherent within it all of the conditions of contract law discussed previously in Part II. If this were not the case, the pre-exilic prophets would be unintelligible. Their forecasts of doom and destruction, their admonitions to the Jews, their reminders of obligations unmet, all foreclose on the possibility of any continued, let alone an unbreakable or eternal, contract with God. The genius of the post-exilic prophets is that they were able so smoothly to breathe just such a concept into Judaism that, to this very day, Biblical scholars see the distinction between a *quid pro quo* contract and an eternally binding relationship, but they do not see it as the specific contribution of the post-exilic prophets.

Moshe Weinfeld, in an otherwise outstanding article in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Vol. 5, pp. 1011-1022), exemplifies the conventional wisdom. He makes the distinction between obligatory and promissory covenants, the latter obligating God but not man. He continues, "Even when Israel sins and is to be severely punished, God intervenes to help because He 'will not break his covenant' (Lev. 26:44)." If we read Leviticus 26 (*Parashah Behukotai*) this is not the sense of the passage. Very clearly, God spells out the rewards if Israel follows His commandments and the dire punishment that almost destroys the people if it does not follow the commandments. Then, *three times*, in verses 40, 41 and 43, the text speaks of the people atoning. Then, and only then, does it say that God will not

break His covenant. In essence, we have a chastised people committing itself anew to a true bi-lateral contract. Weinfeld makes reference to Abraham (Gen. 17, 19) and to David (II Sam.7) as further examples of one-way “promissory” contracts. The Abraham promises were culminated in the true Sinaitic *brit* and become subsumed in the obligations thereunto, while the David promises were analogous to the Aaronide priestly material previously discussed. They do not reflect the relationship of the people Israel to God.

Why do highly competent Biblical scholars insist upon reading a post-exilic phenomenon into a pre-exilic environment, thereby practically destroying the efficacy of the message of the pre-exilic prophets? The reason is obvious: Jewish tradition did its job too well. The post-exilic prophets had to save a *raison d'être* for the people. If they were to confront the “truth” of the broken contract, then there would no longer be a meaningful distinction between the Jewish people and its Babylonian captors. The end of the people would truly have come. Driven by a sense of God and history, these post-exilic prophets found new fundamental truths; and, to their credit, they never denied that Israel had sinned. They merely built upon the earlier tradition by positing a new mission. Afterwards, the tradition could not admit to the “contribution” of these prophets without putting their entire construct in jeopardy. The tradition had to proclaim that the mission of Israel to act as a light to the nations (to spread monotheism), that the *brit olam*, the eternal covenant, expressed God’s will in its earliest manifestation. While this new mission itself is explicable, in the process of being written into a preexisting contract, we arrive at the inexplicable concept of the eternal contract.<sup>7</sup>

We should not assume that the eternal contract sprang full-blown out of the rubble of the exile. Rather, it took time to develop, wending its way through time from Jeremiah to Ezekiel to its complete formulation in Second Isaiah.

The *brit olam* is referred to in Jeremiah 50:5 and 32:40. In 31:3 Jeremiah has God proclaiming a new covenant, a *brit hadashah*. This last reference is set immediately before the fall of King Zedekiah when Jeremiah clearly saw the destruction of Judah:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though

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7. Weinfeld does reinforce the contract analysis in Section II as applied to our covenant with God when, relying on work of G. Mendenhall, he shows that the *brit* with God is patterned after Hittite treaties and commercial pacts. He also shows that the golden calf incident signified the breaking of a contract: “Indeed, the term for cancelling a contract in Babylonian legal literature is ‘to break the tablet’ (tuppen hepu).” Of course, the contract was made a second time. The Jewish genius was applying these existing contract formulas between man and God, what I call the leap of huzpah. Weinfeld comments: “The idea of a covenant between a deity and a people is unknown from other religions and cultures.”

I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (31:31-34).

Clearly, Jeremiah's new covenant goes beyond the traditional commentators' belief that he is signifying that God can be worshipped even in Babylonia, that the Lord is not tied only to the land of Israel. Jeremiah understands the original contract to be broken because Judah did not keep its side of the contract. This must be the interpretation in light of the earlier chapters of Jeremiah where he shares the tenor of the pre-exilic prophetic tradition. Jeremiah understood his contract law. He hedges by putting God's word within their hearts, implying that it will not be a one-way relationship, that the people Israel will meet their obligations. Finally, it is significant that Jeremiah proclaims this *brit ḥadashah*, this new testament, echoing the classic words of the original *brit*, "you will be my people and I will be your God" (Lev. 26:12, Deut. 29:12).

Ezekiel finds it equally difficult to enunciate a theological rationale for the continued interest by God in the people, that crucial concern that Ezekiel knows must be manifest for the sake of the very existence of Israel. Throughout chapter 16, God compares Israel to Sodom and Samaria and then, inexplicably, in verse 60 promises an eternal covenant. In chapter 37, Ezekiel has the famous vision of the dry bones regathered and twice in that chapter (verses 23 and 27) echoes the original covenant—"and they shall be my people and I will be their God." Ezekiel tries hard to maintain the old covenant. He makes no explicit reference, as does Jeremiah, to a new contract. He also presents no philosophical rationale for this covenant, new or old. Although writing after Jeremiah, philosophically he does not progress even to Jeremiah's position, let alone beyond it. We must wait approximately forty more years for Second Isaiah to enunciate this new concept with thorough philosophical underpinnings. Second Isaiah becomes the theologian of the eternal covenant.

Second Isaiah 66:19 explains why the people Israel are in exile: "They shall declare my glory among the nations." Here we have a definite break with the pre-exilic prophecy that exile shall come as an inexorable outgrowth of the sins of the people. In 42:6, Second Isaiah continues this theme by proclaiming that the people Israel shall act as a light to the nations. He then weds his new concept linguistically with the pre-existing *brit* by a peculiar formulation: *v'etenkha l'brit am*—I have set you for a covenant of the people, or, as the Revised Standard Version translates it: I have given you as a covenant to the people. The change of the preposition *of* to *to* in context can be justified, but, most important for our consideration, it highlights the difficulty of making sense of the whole phrase. Once again, dropping the fancy word *covenant* and replacing it with its

synonym, *contract*, we can see the difficulty: I have given you as a contract (*of* or *to*) the people. What is a contract of or to the people? It is relatively meaningless. Isaiah solves this problem elsewhere by expressing the joining of these two concepts (the *brit* and the mission of Israel) by utilizing the phrase *brit olam*, an eternal contract.<sup>8</sup> Thus, we have the complete expression of what can only be classified as a third covenant in Jewish tradition.

#### IV

It is important for us to recognize the eternal covenant as a concept distinct from the original tentative contract previously expressed in Jewish history and as a concept that changes Israel's relationship with God. Once this is recognized we can understand the important historical role that it played in literally saving the Jewish people; but, then, we must return to the needs of contemporary Judaism and ask whether the *brit olam* can play a constructive role.

One can argue with great plausibility that some form of covenant with God is vital to Jewish survival, be that covenant in a literary form or understood in a literal sense. The question is: Which covenant?

The difficulty with Isaiah's *brit olam* is that if we have an eternal contract, then the people Israel can never lose its relationship to God, even if it were to renege on its half of the contract, if we can still use the term "contract". This may be very comforting religion, but is it good religion? The genius of the original contract is that, in its leap of *hūzpa*, it drew mankind, if only for a moment, up to God's stature and then demanded of it standards of conduct equal to that stature, all the while reinforcing that demand with the clear understanding that Israel's special relationship with God is temporary, requiring each generation to renew it through its conduct. It is this glorious demand upon the people that is lost in Second Isaiah's reconstruction.

It is our challenge today, if we Jews are to see ourselves as unique in any religious sense, not to discard the concept of the chosen people, of having a special covenant with God; but of reaffirming that contract in its original sense before its redirection by Second Isaiah. It is our challenge to become original, basic Jews, with obligations to God, receiving, in return, a sense of special relationship to Him. It is not important whether that present relationship rests upon an actual happening, a contract signed

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8. Isaiah 55:3, 61:8. There is one reference in First Isaiah (24:5) of the people breaking the everlasting covenant. There is little chance that it is authentically First Isaiah. Never does a pre-exilic prophet use this phrase. One can argue that here we have a commingling of the two books. Another explanation is found in the generally acknowledged fact that chapters 24 through 27 are of a later period and not attributable to First Isaiah. Although this reference may be unimportant for the purposes of this paper, it may be exceedingly important as an adumbration of the post-Biblical concept of the Noahide Laws. Robert Gordis in "A Basis for Morals: Ethics in a Technological Age" in the Winter 1976 issue of *JUDAISM*, sees the Noahide Laws as one of the foundations of a Jewish, natural law, ethical system that avoids the conservative and static nature of natural law as received through the Scholastic School and the Church.

and sealed at Sinai at an historical point in time, or whether that contract is a literary construct, the product of genius and of visionaries. We can feel the personal obligations of that contract on us in either case.

The challenge for us today is to spell out in particulars, as one would clearly write any contract, on the one side what we expect of God, or, alternatively stated, what we expect our belief in God will do for us, and, on the other side, what obligations we have, and what services we must render, to fulfill our half of the contract.

Out of this inherent, insecure and temporary nature of a true covenant must come belief and a definition of moral conduct, for that is the major ingredient of the service that we must render to God to fulfill the covenant. It is time that we begin to give some serious attention to our contractual obligations. It is time for a new leap of *huzpah*.

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# *The Threnodist of the Holocaust*

NOAH H. ROSENBLUM

THOUSANDS OF JEWISH SCHOLARS, PHILOSOPHERS, theologians, educators, writers, and poets perished in the twentieth century *furor teutonicus* which left in its wake the ashes of six million Jews. From the scant materials unearthed after the Holocaust we may assume that some of these intellectuals, though traumatized, had continued to write, record and create, notwithstanding the Damoclean sword swinging over their heads. Regrettably, the findings are so meagre that we will never discover the extent of that loss, thus compounding the biological genocide with an intellectual one.

That such materials existed in abundance is no mere conjecture. The martyred historian, Emmanuel Ringelblum, who dedicated himself to gathering and preserving documents and evidential materials and recording the swift moving events of the ebbing life in the Warsaw Ghetto, noted that "everyone used to write in the ghetto, journalists, writers, social workers, teachers, young people, and even children." Survivors of the Holocaust substantiate this assertion in their memoirs, stating that many such manuscripts were frequently confiscated or lost upon the author's deportation. They might have been destroyed by the remaining family for fear of reprisals, or were consumed in the burning ghetto buildings and were never unearthed. Who knows how many diaries, like the few that were found, written by the young, like Anna Frank, or Moshe Flinker, or by the aged, like Chaim Aaron Kaplan, or histories similar to that of Ringelblum, or literary works of the caliber of Yitzhak Katzenelson's, were consigned to flames and committed to oblivion?

The loss of these writings adds an additional dimension to the tragic martyrdom of their authors, not only because it robbed them of their last vestige of immortality, but because their great wish was, at least, to reach posterity from beyond their physical existence. So powerful was this passion that even the spectre of tortured death was no deterrent. Impelled by a consuming sense of mission to bear testimony to what they knew would sound incredible, these sick, terrorized and starved people continued, to the very last, courageously and defiantly, to write and to record.

On July 26, 1942, four days after the beginning of the mass deportations of Warsaw's 500,000 Jews and only a few days before the diarist himself perished in the lethal chambers of Treblinka, Chaim Kaplan explained what prompted his tenacity of purpose and determination to record at any sacrifice.

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Some of my friends and acquaintances who know the secret of my diary urge me, in their despair, to stop writing. "Why? For what purpose? Will you live to see it published? Will these words of yours reach the ears of future generations? How? If you are deported you won't be able to take it with you because the Nazis will watch your every move, and even if you succeed in hiding it when you leave Warsaw, you will undoubtedly die on the way, for your strength is ebbing. And if you don't die from lack of strength, you will die by the Nazi sword. For not a single deportee will be able to hold out to the end of the war."

And yet, in spite of it all, I refuse to listen to them. I feel that continuing this diary to the very end of my physical and spiritual strength is a historical mission which must not be abandoned. My mind is still clear, my need to record unstilled, though it is now five days since any real food has passed my lips. Therefore I will not silence my diary.<sup>1</sup>

His most overriding concern was not the preservation of his life, but of his diary. On July 31, 1942, he wrote:

My powers are insufficient to record all that is worthy of being written. Most of all, I am worried that I may be consuming my strength for naught. Should I, too, be taken, all my efforts will be wasted. My utmost concern is for hiding my diary so that it will be preserved for future generations. As long as my pulse beats I shall continue my sacred task.<sup>2</sup>

Most significant is the last line in his diary on August 4th, "If my life ends—what will become of my diary?"<sup>3</sup>

Kaplan was not the only one to value his records above his life. Two young students, Nahum Grzywacz, age 18, and David Gruber, age 19, were engaged in concealing the Warsaw Ghetto archives. Completing his task, Nahum wrote:

We have decided to describe the present. Yesterday we sat until late at night because we did not know whether we would be alive the next day. Now I am in the middle of writing and there is terrible shooting in the street. Nevertheless, I am proud that in these difficult, fateful days I was one of those who buried the treasure. . . . concealed these materials so that you will know about the suffering and murder of the Hitlerite tyranny.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, Gruber noted:

We must hurry because time is running out. Yesterday we worked until late at night. . . . I want future generations to recall our times, our sufferings and pain. Let them remember that in the time of such disaster there were people who had the courage to do this. . . . We were mindful of our responsibility. We did not fear the consequences considering that what we

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1. Chaim A. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, tr. Abraham I. Katsh (New York, 1965), pp. 323-4.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 334-5.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 340.

4. Rachel Auerbach, *Varshever Tzavaes*, (Tel Aviv: Israel Buch Verlag, 1975), p. 197 (Yiddish). See also S.N., "The Will of the Two Jungbor" *DAPPIM*, (Studies of the Holocaust and the Jewish Resistance), I(1969): 266-278 (Hebrew).



are doing for history outweighs the lives of individuals. . . . Where do we bury the treasure? They may pull us limb from limb yet we will not reveal the secret. . . . I wish I could live to see when the treasure will be exhumed and the truth will be written. . . . We will, however, definitely not live to see it. . . . Now we can die in peace. We have accomplished our mission.<sup>5</sup>

One of the martyred writers whose works were fortunately exhumed by surviving admirers was Yitzhak Katzenelson (1886-1944). In the Jewish community of Poland between the World Wars he enjoyed the reputation of being a leading Hebrew educator and a prolific, versatile, bilingual poet and playwright whose lyrics were popular in Zionist circles and whose plays received wide acclaim.

The first eight years of his childhood, Katzenelson passed in the townlet of his birth, Korelichi, White Russia. After spending two years in Zgierz, near Łódź, the family finally settled permanently in Łódź proper, Poland's most industrial metropolis. These relocations were prompted by Katzenelson's father's search for a suitable position as a Hebrew teacher.

Katzenelson's knowledge of, and love for, Hebrew literature, as well as his future career as an educator and poet, must be attributed, in some measure, to his father's early influence. He received his fundamental education in his father's school, which attracted many bright pupils, notably among them the later renowned Hebrew poet, Ya'acov Cahan. Much to his regret, Katzenelson was compelled by dire economic conditions to terminate his education before the age of Bar Mitzvah and to find employment as a private tutor, a merchant clerk and, thereafter, as an apprentice in a small textile workshop owned by a relative. The last two ventures were unsuccessful, but far more disappointing to him was his failure to be accepted in a Russian gymnasium because of the anti-Semitic restrictions for Jewish students, the *numerus clausus*. Similarly frustrating were his efforts to pass the examinations as an externist, which might have enabled him to be accepted in a university.

Suddenly, however, Katzenelson's personal problems and perplexities were relegated to the background by the eruption of revolutionary forces in Russia in 1905. The tremors of this socio-economic upheaval were soon felt in Łódź, which had large numbers of factory workers and a vast, exploited, starving proletariat. Strikes, riots and anti-government demonstrations, paralyzing and crippling the city's economy, became common phenomena. Many young Jews, much to the dismay and consternation of their elders, were attracted by the romanticism and idealism of the rebels, joining the demonstrations and taking an active part in the revolutionary activities. They were roused, not only by the social injustices of the oppressive Czarist regime, but by the flagrant anti-Semitic policy and virulent propaganda that had instigated so many savage pogroms, that of Kishinev being the most notorious.

5. Auerbach, *Op. cit.*, p. 198.

6. Vittel Notebook, July 30, 1943.

Young Katzenelson was swept away with the intoxicating spirit of this abortive revolution. His brief experience as a worker, coupled with the outrage that he felt as a Jew, induced him, as it did many other young Jews, to disregard his parents' solicitous concern and openly to display his sympathy for the revolutionaries.

As expected, the Czarist regime retaliated swiftly. Its activist reactionary bands, the so called Black Hundreds, swooped down on all liberal and revolutionary elements, singling out with particular ferocity any Jews suspected of pro-revolutionary sympathies. Katzenelson, who in his youthful exuberance had hardly concealed his sentiments, was in danger of imminent arrest and had to leave for Warsaw, where he was unknown, in the hope that this careless, youthful episode might soon be forgotten. Luckily, he was warmly welcomed in the Hebrew literary circles of that city, particularly by those who were familiar with some of his writing. There he had the opportunity to meet the literary luminaries of the time, whose impression upon him was profound.

After serving in the Russian army for six months, and after a trip to Switzerland, he entered the field of Hebrew education in earnest. His choice in this respect, while undeniably it can be traced back to his father's influence, was, however, primarily determined by the fact that, under the circumstances, it was the only avenue open to him. An important factor in this respect, that must not be discounted, was his extraordinary love for children, whose very presence had an exhilarating effect on him. Moreover, the luxuriant efflorescence of modern Hebrew, paralleling the meteoric rise of political Zionism and Jewish national consciousness, endowed progressive Hebrew education with the aura of a national mission. Nationally, therefore, Katzenelson saw in teaching not merely a profession but a sacred task; personally, it enabled him to develop his talent in creating in Hebrew a children's literature which was then almost nonexistent.

While a considerable part of his writing was designed for children and young Zionist pioneers, he did not neglect the more serious, deeper aspect of literature, and his output was well received in Hebrew and Yiddish literary circles within and without Poland. His poem, "Within the Borders of Lithuania" (1909), and his drama, *The Prophet*, were viewed as highly meritorious. Katzenelson was particularly proud to gain recognition from leading men of letters like J. L. Peretz, David Frischmann, and Hayyim Nahman Bialik, and to count among his friends such writers and poets as Yaacov Cahan, Zalman Shneur, David Shimoni and Y. D. Berkowitz.

Katzenelson's proclivity for light, melodious love poems and his propensity for romanticism, which largely pervaded Hebrew literature in his time, made him an avid admirer of Heine. He was so impressed by the latter that he devoted several years to rendering Heine's poetry into Hebrew and was delighted to see it in print in 1924. Katzenelson is

reported to have been an exceptionally amiable person, whose *joie de vivre* was contagious. His home, like that of Peretz in Warsaw, became the gathering place for the writers, poets and artists of Łódź and nearby communities and his advice was frequently solicited by many budding literati.

Neither his genre of literature nor his vivacious temperament, good spirits, wit and cheerful personality seemed to predispose him to become the Jeremiah of the Holocaust. The poet who sang at the beginning of the century about light (“*Zohar*”), the beautiful nights in Canaan (“*Yafim ha-Lelot bi-Khnaan*”) and love (“*Ahavah*”) seemed hardly a likely candidate to sing the doleful, macabre dirge, “The Song of the Murdered Jewish People.” Nevertheless, it seems as if fate had destined him for this tragic task, which neither he nor anyone who knew him could have predicted.

Katzenelson’s very presence in Poland at the time of the German invasion appears as if preordained by some inscrutable power. Unlike the vast Jewish masses who never ventured beyond the Polish borders, Katzenelson visited many European countries as well as the United States. Moreover, as an ardent Zionist, Hebrew educator, writer and poet, he could have joined many of his colleagues who made Palestine their home. Nevertheless, contrary to his own *halutz* ideology, his Zionist conviction and his exhortations to others to settle in the nascent Jewish Homeland, he remained in Poland to share the fate of his brethren. Twice he went to Palestine and waxed ecstatic over the progress of its pioneers, the revival of Hebrew and the dynamic cultural advancement, yet after each prolonged stay he returned to Poland. It is difficult to find a plausible explanation for the gravitational pull that anti-Semitic Poland had for him. It seems that his umbilical cord to the Jewish community in Poland could not be severed, and while Palestine was the land of his dreams, Poland, with its teeming Jewish masses and unique life-style, was the terrain of his reality.

Thus, Katzenelson was trapped with the millions of Jewish masses whom he loved when the Germans opened their ferocious *Blitzkrieg* against Poland on September 1, 1939. Eight days later, Łódź, the city in which he had lived for 35 years, was occupied by the invaders, sealing the fate of its Jewish inhabitants. A reign of indescribable horror was instituted and decree followed decree with bewildering rapidity, leaving the Jewish population disoriented, terrified and helpless. Among the initial harassments were the curtailment of movement, the order to wear a distinctive badge with the Star of David on it, sudden arrests, confiscations, unexpected expulsions, impressment into forced labor coupled with humiliations and tortures, and abductions from which the victims never returned. Jewish religious, social and cultural life, which had evolved over a period of many centuries, came to an abrupt end and all institutions were shut. Katzenelson’s school fell victim to the circumstances and later, ironically, served as the Gestapo headquarters. The

poet was compelled to go into hiding for fear of incarceration and inevitable death, since the Germans made the liquidation of the Jewish leadership, the cultural elite, and the intelligentsia their prime target.

After three months of living in constant fear of being detected and apprehended, Katzenelson finally acceded to his wife's pleas to depart for Warsaw. Since it was the most densely populated Jewish community in Europe, she hoped that it would offer him, as it had nearly three decades earlier, a greater opportunity for anonymity and safety.

Much to Katzenelson's distress, the situation in Warsaw was not different from that in Łódź. Moreover, the devastation caused by the bombardment of Warsaw was far worse because the Luftwaffe had concentrated its might against the Polish capital from the moment of the outbreak of hostilities. Katzenelson thus found himself an abandoned stranger, one among thousands who, like him, had arrived there from near and far hoping to find it a city of refuge. The influx of these poor, hungry and homeless refugees, many with large families, compounded the misery of the local Jewish population who were already enduring privations and were exposed to relentless violence, terror, and sadism. The new arrivals particularly aggravated the housing situation, since many of the indigenous Jewish inhabitants were themselves homeless. In addition, the thousands of refugees drained the dwindling food supplies and further strained to the limit the over-taxed communal organizations which were already in disarray.

Katzenelson shared the misery and tribulations of the multitudes of starving refugees who crowded the bombed-out Warsaw streets and burned buildings. His situation became more acute when he was joined subsequently by his wife, Hannah, and his three young sons, Zvi, Ben-Zion and Benjamin, who had been expelled from Łódź and, who after a long and torturous journey, had finally gotten to Warsaw. Their presence heightened his spirit, but their plight, which he could not alleviate, deepened his despair. The pervading gloom and despondency paralyzed his creativity and rendered him incapable of expressing his personal pain or the agony of his people. This literary impotence, coupled with his physical and spiritual exhaustion, further increased his frustration and intensified his feeling of dejection.

Slowly, however, Katzenelson started to limp back to normalcy and to recover his composure. Like many Warsaw Jews who had begun to raise themselves, Phoenix-like, from the wreckage and ashes, he, too, gradually emerged from the pall of darkness under which he had existed since the outbreak of the war. An important factor contributing to the restoration of his psychological equilibrium was the Zionist-socialist pioneer organization, *D'ror* (Liberty), which clandestinely resumed its activities in Warsaw. Clinging to the hope of an eventual, speedy Allied victory which would also signify the liberation of the oppressed Jews, Katzenelson

involved himself eagerly in the organization's educational work, teaching Bible and Hebrew literature.

The very contact with the *haluzim* and the young students had a salutary effect on Katzenelson, rejuvenating him, uplifting his spirit and giving him a new lease on life. Within a short time he became intoxicated with his new mission to teach, inspire and instill hope into both the young and old so that they might overcome their torment, degradation and fear, and aspire to a brighter future. Soon he was not content with merely teaching small groups of students or lecturing before limited circles of *haluzim*, and in the endeavor to reach the Jewish masses, so dear to him, he wrote articles, poems and plays for the underground press, frequently under assumed names. Some themes dealt with the concrete actuality; others were cast in a Biblical or historical frame with transparent allusions to the contemporary scene. These poems and plays were read or performed before trusted audiences.

Katzenelson's concern for the Jewish masses apparently prompted him to write in their language, Yiddish; hence, the preponderance of Yiddish in his ghetto writings. Only this language, he felt, would enable him to identify himself with them completely and to communicate directly. It is also possible that the stressful circumstances caused him to revert to Yiddish, which was his, and their, mother tongue and in which he was most authentic.

For nearly three and a half years Katzenelson lived in terror-stricken Warsaw. He had the sad privilege of witnessing the erection of the ghetto, the decimation of its Jewish inhabitants, and its final destruction. "Not a single day passed," he recalled later, "for me or for any Jew that we should not be horror stricken. The sights on every street made my blood freeze in my veins."<sup>6</sup> These atrocities notwithstanding, Katzenelson, like most of the Jews in the first two years of the occupation, had not perceived the ultimate sinister design of the Germans. The most cruel oppressions, imprisonments and privations were viewed as inevitable corollaries of the war. Disproportionate reprisals, expulsions and mass executions were seen as isolated incidents and not as constituent acts of a well prepared scheme.

Writing after this demoniacal apocalypse had become a reality, he reminisced how, at the time, such an eventuality seemed unthinkable to the Jews:

The Gentiles believed, but we, the would-be victims, did not. No Jew believed that an insane nation. . . would slaughter six millions. . . the entire Jewish people. . . . We did not believe because of the Divine image we have. . . . We did not believe because we are human.

We heard everything. We heard about the school. . . a school for genocide, to murder the Jewish people quietly, deliberately, in cold blood and smilingly. . . . In the divisions of this school they were taught to be patient,

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6. *Vittel Notebook*, July 30, 1943.

deliberate and diligent in the extermination of a people. . . . They spoke openly about the brigade to destroy and annihilate the Jews. The *Ver-nichtungsbrigade* was known the world over. . . . Nevertheless, we Jews who abhor bloodshed, the murder of the guiltless and innocent, could not believe that they would extirpate our people totally.<sup>7</sup>

In his play, *By the Waters of Babylon*, written at the beginning of 1941 on a Biblical theme, but replete with obvious references to the analogous situation of the Jews by the waters of the Vistula, one of his major characters eloquently presents the philosophy of *Kiddush ha-Hayyim*, the sanctification of life. Kuliah, a Judean refugee in Babylon and a former venerable elder in Jerusalem, severely reprimands a young man, Shemaiah, for having attempted suicide. Kuliah exacts from Shemaiah, who has been rescued against his will, a solemn promise never to make a similar venture, because, gruesome as the prospects might be, the most sacred command for the Jew, under the prevailing circumstances, is to stay alive.

The denizens of the Warsaw Ghetto soon apprehended the gruesome news about the annihilation of the Jews in the Polish provinces. They heard about large and small centuries-old Jewish communities which had become *Judenrein* with incredible suddenness. Nor was the destiny of the deportees any mystery. Some fugitives from these deportations, or even from extermination centres, reached the Warsaw Ghetto and related their maddening and blood-curdling experiences. With consternation and bewilderment the Jews of Warsaw listened to those eyewitnesses, aware that their own day of doom was swiftly approaching. Rumors were current about Himmler's visit to Warsaw and the arrival of dreaded resettlement brigades—*Aussiedlungsbrigaden*—or, as they were less euphemistically termed, extermination brigades, *Vernichtungsbrigaden*.

Katzenelson, having shared the hopes and some of the illusions of the Jewish inhabitants in the Warsaw Ghetto, now shared their anxieties, fears and disillusionments. If the poems written in the latter part of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 reflect the sadness and the sufferings of the Jews and compare their agony to that of Job—in a drama by this title—his poems in the course of 1942 became more acrimonious, premonitory and sepulchral. Addressing a gathering of teachers on Passover, 1942, Katzenelson told them of the possibility that, instead of Elijah the Prophet, the Angel of Death might visit their Seder. He urged them to be ready for such an eventuality.

In a poem bristling with indignation and grief, he employed the theme of the prayer traditionally recited at the Seder when the door is opened for Elijah: "Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations who know Thee not and upon the kingdoms who know not Thy name, for they have

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7. Ibid.

devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation (Psalms 79:6-7). Pour out Thy indignation upon them and let the fierceness of Thy anger overtake them (Psalms 69:24). Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under thy heavens, O Lord" (Lamentations 3:66). Katzenelson developed this theme of outrage and transformed it into a frightening malediction, pouring out his people's wrath against their most cruel contemporary enemy. He no longer restrained his bitterness nor did he express it in veiled, ambiguous language, but was candid, direct, open and daring, though the consequences for such fearlessness did not elude him.

On July 22, 1942, a day before the fast of *Tisha b'Av*, the previously rumored mass deportations of Warsaw Jews began. Within the first few weeks most of its half a million inhabitants were forcibly deported to the lethal chambers of Treblinka. Despite the common knowledge of the true destination of the victims, the Germans continued to maintain their deception that the Jews were being resettled in the Eastern occupied territories. But the suicide of Adam Czerniakow, president of the Warsaw *Judenrat*, confirmed the worse premonitions and belied the assertions of the Germans. It soon became known that Czerniakow had refused to comply with the German order to sign a proclamation raising the daily quota of deportation from the originally agreed upon 6,000 to 10,000. His death, while not deeply mourned because the Jews looked upon him as a German tool, even if a reluctant one, was seen as an omen of things to come. Even Katzenelson, who, like many, had always been contemptuous of Czerniakow's cooperation with the Germans, was moved by his final act:

You are not much of a Jew, Adamie. You take poison? Commit suicide?  
A Jew is killed. . . O, to get killed takes greater courage. . .  
But it doesn't matter. . . You drink? You cleanse yourself, Adamie?  
Your life, yes, your life—semi-apostasy. . .  
Your death has greater meaning.

Katzenelson belonged to the category of the so-called unproductive elements who were among the first to be deported. According to the German authorities, who cunningly continued their mendacity until the very last, only an official identity card, *Ausweis*, indicating useful employment in a German factory, exempted its holder from resettlement; the others were taken at once to the *Umschlagplatz* for deportation. Luckily, Katzenelson's friends provided him with such a document and he was successful in joining a shop that he referred to by the Biblical metaphor "the horns of the altar," because of the immunity that it allegedly conferred. Much to his grief, this privileged status did not save his wife and his two sons, Ben-Zion and Benjamin, who, along with thousands of other Jews, were deported to Treblinka on August 14, 1942. This disaster crushed him almost completely and his sole consolation remained his oldest son, Zvi.

Although at first the Germans gave the impression that the deporta-



tions would be limited both in scope and in time and that only the few unproductive Jews would be resettled and the untransportable eliminated, the hunt and deportations were escalated and the accompanying brutal terror continued unabated. On September 6, 1942, on Mila Street, the Germans rounded up thousands of so-called protected Jews, many of whom had been productively employed in German shops which had sprung up in the ghetto, and sent them to Treblinka. Katzenelson described the final march of the protected Jews caught in the unexpected raid:

These were Jews from shops of part of Nowolipie  
and part of Lesz,  
The Jews with the numbers, fortunate Jews!  
Jews who luckily  
Got into a shop. The last few Jews.  
Yes, the remnant! The remnant. . . .

Jews from these shops and Jews from Gensia, from  
far away, the Kehillah Jews.  
Tin plates on their chests and brooms for sweeping  
empty streets in their hands.  
Platzuvka Jews who march every morning from the  
ghetto singing.

This time Katzenelson was fortunate to escape, only to have another close brush with death on January 18, 1943, when the first premature and abortive revolt in the Warsaw ghetto took place. He had come to spend some time with a *D'ror* group and was caught with them in a sudden German encirclement. Apprehensively, they awaited their encounter and end. Tuvia Borzykowski, who was with Katzenelson in the same *D'ror* unit, tells of that dread-laden moment:

It was at that great moment, just as we were to raise our hands against the enemy, that the great poet Yitzhak Katzenelson who was with us said the words which will forever remain engraved in my memory: "I am happy that I am going to die together with *haluzim*. We are to perish in the knowledge that the Jewish people will live forever."

As he finished speaking, the door broke open and a group of Germans burst into the room. The first to attack them were Zecharia Artstein and Henech Guttman, both of whom had shown great bravery on that day. . . .

Thus the battle ended with our victory. The Germans did not succeed in taking even one Jew out of the house and lost two of their men whose weapons we appropriated.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Tuvia Borzykowski, *Between Tumbling Walls* (Israel: Kibbutz of the ghetto Fighters, n.d.) pp. 24-25.

This episode was also long remembered by Katzenelson, who recorded it in his final elegy in the *Vittel Notebook*.

The great ghetto uprising, on the eve of Passover, erupted three months later, on April 19, 1943. Katzenelson was already fifty-seven years old by then and, despite his eagerness, and though his presence might have been inspiring, it was hardly a military asset, so that prior to the outbreak of the revolt he and his son, Zvi, were smuggled over to the Aryan side of Warsaw. They remained in hiding there for three months. The prospects for Katzenelson to survive in a hideout in that area were hardly bright. Soon, however, an opportunity presented itself which rekindled a faint glimmer of hope. The Germans were extremely anxious, at that time, to find foreigners, even Jews, *Austauschjuden*, to be exchanged for German war prisoners who had been captured by the Allies. In their search for such foreigners they were not meticulous about passports. There were few who possessed foreign papers, but Katzenelson and his son were provided by their friends with forged Honduras passports. Such documents were highly valued and people made every possible effort, including the payment of fantastic sums, to obtain them. Katzenelson, who was greatly respected, was given priority and in May, 1942, he and his son, together with some other lucky Jews, were dispatched to Vittel, France.

It is noteworthy that neither the reign of terror nor the mass liquidations failed to dampen Katzenelson's literary activity. The themes of this period, however, depart sharply from those of the earlier ghetto writings. Gone is the motif of *Kiddush ha-Hayyim*, the sanctification of life by staying alive; gone, too, are the wailing and the impotent curses. There is now the conscious, or unconscious, realization that *Kiddush ha-Hayyim* did not save the Jews who had clung tenaciously to life nor did the curses hurt the Germans. The poems of this period accentuate the old Jewish motif of *Kiddush ha-Shem*, courageous martyrdom, death with dignity, and defiance. Apparently, Katzenelson now considered extermination inevitable and, since every Jew was doomed to die, he might as well die with pride. Thus, he sang of the death of Shlomo Zelichowsky from Zdunska Wola, a townlet near Lodz, who had been hanged by the Germans, with a minyan of other Jews, on the eve of the Shavuot festival in 1942. Before mounting the gallows, this simple Hasidic Jew had urged his fellow victims neither to bemoan their fate nor to display any grief, but, like him, to meet their end proudly with a song on their lips.

Katzenelson expressed a similar idea in his long epic poem "The Song about the Radziner," in which he elevated young Rabbi Shmuel Shlomo Leiner (1909-1942), a scion of the famous Hasidic dynasty of Radzin, to the stature of epic heroism. The rabbi, according to reports, had called upon the Jews not to submit to German tyranny, to refuse cooperation, to abandon the ghetto and to escape to the woods where they should become fighting partisans. He had allegedly castigated the ap-

pointed leaders of *Judenräte* for their obsequiousness, for becoming tools in the hands of the enemy and thus causing the death of their own brethren. Upon learning about the rabbi's activities, the Germans began to hunt for him and when they found him they put him to death. According to Katzenelson, who mixed truth with fiction and facts with imagination, the rabbi left his secure hiding place in Wlodowa, rejected an invitation from Warsaw, where he was promised safety and comfort, and left for Lublin, where he found the freight trains which transported the Lublin Jews, who were among the first to be exterminated. He buried those who had died on the way and resuscitated the few who had been left by the Germans. Hearing, upon his return, that the Germans were threatening to destroy the entire Jewish community unless he surrendered, the rabbi bade farewell to his wife and went calmly, courageously and proudly to give his life to save the Jews. His last words to his wife were:

"Yes! They will kill me!" he told her sternly,  
And longingly added: "I wish I were to die  
Like Rabbi Akiba—my body should be combed  
with iron combs. . . ."

Thus, the old way of martyrdom, harking back to the Hadrianic era, reappears in Katzenelson's last works in the ghetto. The new *Kiddush ha-Shem* no longer had religious, theological or doctrinal connotation, yet it continued to signify dying with dignity. Even if Jews could not die for the glory of God, they could, at least, die as a proud people.

Upon their arrival in Vittel, Katzenelson and Zvi were given a small private room, though with the barest furnishings, and were also provided with food and such elementary comforts as they had not enjoyed for a long time. There was no harassment and, most significant, there was the glimmer of hope that he and his son might be exchanged for Germans held in Allied prisons. Nevertheless, as evident from the first entry in the *Vittel Notebook*, on the first day there he was distraught and agitated. The sight of a barbed wire evoked painful memories in him, even though it was far less foreboding than were the tall massive walls of the Warsaw Ghetto. Minor incidents became major sources of irritation. Zvi's smoking and his calmness, or the garrulity and normal curiosity of some young Jewish girl internees provoked the poet to inordinate outbursts of anger. The girls' makeup repelled him and he thought them to be "painted like whores," their Polish speech grated on his ears, and the sound of a violin caused him to explode: "If the murderers of my wife and sons will not kill me, this violin will."

Katzenelson himself seemed to have realized the paradox of his mood. "During these last ten months I have not had such a roomy apartment, nor such a bed to sleep on, yet I am conscious of an oppression much greater than ever before." However, his reaction, in the context of

his experiences, was not strange at all. Living in the abysmal conditions of the ghetto, in a perennial state of tension and in constant danger for his life, struggling to survive, tormented by hunger, thirst, and sleeplessness, he had no chance to think and reflect. Now the sudden fortuitous change to the new surrounding which seemed to give him a new lease on life presented him with leisure and the opportunity to recollect, ponder and brood. All of the pent-up fears, anxieties, traumas, and sufferings suddenly surged and surfaced to his conscious mind, overwhelming him with his own agonizing memories. Unable to control his emotions, he was compelled to discontinue his notes for two months.

To escape the painful memories which inundated him, he turned to a subject that was remote in time and space, to once-free Carthage of twenty-two centuries ago, with its brilliant hero, Hannibal. Already as a young boy, Hannibal had accompanied his father, Hamilcar Barca, on the expedition to conquer Spain and later, as a young man, he had vigorously fought alongside his brother-in-law, Hasdrubal, for the dominion of the Iberian peninsula. Becoming commander-in-chief of the Cathaginian forces after the assassination of Hasdrubal, Hannibal swept through the Pyrenees and Alps, inflicting a crushing defeat upon the Roman legions under the command of Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, and threatening Rome with total destruction. In the end, however, he was himself defeated by the Romans under the generalship of the younger Scipio Aemilianus, Carthage was besieged and destroyed in flames and its inhabitants were mercilessly massacred.

If profound sadness, according to Gustave Flaubert, is an absolute prerequisite for the reconstruction and portrayal of Carthage, nobody was more eminently qualified for this task than Katzenelson. Unlike the author of *Salamambo*, Katzenelson had a Carthage which was real and near. What attracted Katzenelson to Hannibal in the days of his maddening loneliness is unknown, particularly since he never completed his drama, of which only the first act remains, and judging from the theme which he selected, it seems that his conscious effort to escape the gruesome present by taking an imaginary flight to remote antiquity and a distant geographical location, was a dismal failure. Apparently, no matter how hard he worked to extricate himself from his incubus, he sank back into the valley of haunting shadows. As he noted on July 21, 1943:

I discontinued to record for fear of going mad and committing suicide. Thereupon I took refuge behind a different altar—I wrote a play, *Hannibal*, which alludes to “Judea.” However, *Hannibal* did not save me from the throes of insanity which frequently assailed me. It was the stream of tears, the wringing of hands in fearful despair over the irreparable loss that saved me. When I finished the first part of *Hannibal* (three scenes) I returned to haul up (memories) from black hell and record on white paper.

Katzenelson realized that he had merely deflected the events of the war of contemporary Aryans, the Germans, against the Semitic Jews, to

the Punic Wars in antiquity when the Aryans of those days, the Romans, carried out a genocide campaign against the Semitic Carthaginians. Thus, the intervening two millennia had merely changed the locus and nomenclature of the *dramatis personae*, but the scenario remained constant and the underlying perennial racial antagonism between the Aryan and Semitic people continued. Katzenelson's endeavor to ease his psychological stress by avoiding an obvious Jewish theme, like the Roman War against Judea, or Jewish warriors like Johanan of Giscala or Simon bar Giora, instead of the Carthaginian Hannibal, failed to serve as a catharsis for his emotions. After two months, he returned to writing his recollections, painful through they were.

The immediate factor which impelled him to overcome his reluctance was the anniversary of the beginning of mass deportations from the Warsaw ghetto. He resumed the *Vittel Notebook* on July 21, 1943, and continued until September 16. Considering himself one of the few to have survived the Holocaust, he felt that he had a sacred obligation to bear witness to the greatest tragedy that had befallen the Jewish people. He was apprehensive that the free world, and particularly the Jews overseas, would neither learn nor believe the horrors of the Holocaust and that the six million Jewish victims would be completely forgotten. On August 20th he wrote:

Who will mourn for us? Who will erect a monument for us. . .  
 Who will write a Jewish *Mousa Dag*?  
 When the Armenians were murdered a Jew bewailed  
 them in a book but when the Jewish people were  
 murdered who will mourn them? Who will?

In the absence of an elegist of the stature of Franz Werfel, who had eloquently expressed sorrow and outrage over the Turkish massacre of the Armenians, Katzenelson felt that destiny had put it upon his shoulders to do as much for the murdered Jewish people. Despite the relative respite at Vittel, he had misgivings about his chance to elude the fires of the crematorium. In this atmosphere of suspense and tension, oscillating between hope and despair, life and death, he was unable to record the events he had witnessed and to describe objectively the history of the Jews under a German tyranny from the time of the invasion until the final liquidation. The *Vittel Notebook* contains fragmentary, painful reminiscences, recollections, reflections, ramblings, digressions, political comments, and philosophic excursions, interspersed with protestations and expletives, as well as rhetorical and declamatory phrases. The *Vittel Notebook* does not contain any new information. It is, however, of inestimable value about the psychological reaction to the Holocaust, if not of the vast segments of the Jewish community, at least of a deeply sensitive Jewish poet.

Like other chroniclers during the German occupation, Katzenelson, too, valued his *Notebook* above his own life. On August 27, 1943, he wrote:

I shall hide these papers, for if the German murderers find them they will destroy these fragmentary notes which record only the merest fraction of the tortures brought upon us by this vile and murderous people.

On October 3, 1943, two days after Rosh Hashanah, he began to write his most famous poem, "*Dos Lid Fun Oysgeharteten Yiddishen Folk*," ("The Song of the Murdered Jewish People"), which he completed three and a half months later, on January 18, 1944. This poem, which became the jeremiad of the Holocaust, was dedicated to the memory of his wife and of his brother, Berl.<sup>9</sup>

Katzenelson's threnody is the swan song of European Jewry as well as of the author. This fact constitutes its paramount and impressive uniqueness in the literature of the Holocaust. Many works that are already in existence or that will emerge in the future may be more expressive, imaginative, profound and emotive. No work, however, can, or ever will, equal Katzenelson's poem in authenticity or in the author's personal involvement and direct experience. Its pre-eminence will always lie in its primeval force, unsophisticated veracity, unvarnished quality and visceral simplicity. No other poet will ever feel that personal grief, bereavement and absolute sense of identification with the many, among the millions of victims, whom he knew intimately and whose fate he shared.

Katzenelson's poem cannot be judged, therefore, by any ordinary criteria of literary criticism, since none have ever been evolved for the evaluation of a death rattle or for the gasp *in extremis*. Its greatest distinction is its *de profundis* nature, a quality that will never be matched. "Of all that is written," said Zarathustra, "I love only what a person hath written with his blood." Katzenelson wrote his threnody of the Holocaust with his blood and the blood of his family and his people, and in this respect it will remain unique.

Exactly two months after completing "The Song of the Murdered Jewish People," Katzenelson and Zvi, together with other internees, were removed from Vittel to the transit camp at Drancy, near Paris, whence, after a brief stay, they were deported to Auschwitz along with other Polish Jews who had Latin American passports.

The mystery about the change in the German policy toward the internees at Vittel has yet to be unravelled. Many theories have been advanced, one being the procrastination of the Latin American governments in recognizing the passports which had been issued by some of their consuls in Europe. Most agonizing is the fact that two weeks after Katzenelson was deported from Vittel, on May 31, 1944, the German authorities recognized the validity of the passports which he and his fellow

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9. Soon to be published by *Bet Loḥamei ha-Ghettaot*, *Hakibbuz*, *Hameuḥad*, Israel.

internees possessed.<sup>10</sup> Similarly regretful is the fact that the British Mandatory Government had granted him a certificate to emigrate to Palestine, but the German authorities, or the camp commander, either refused to inform him or to recognize it.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in spite of all efforts by his friends in Europe and in Palestine, Katzenelson was destined to share the cruel fate of his people.

A short time before his deportation, Katzenelson, assisted by another internee, Miriam Novitch, who fortunately survived, succeeded in concealing the Vittel manuscripts. Later she recalled how they had managed to hide "The Song of the Murdered Jewish People:"

The poet placed the writings in three small bottles. I produced a knife and a small cinder rake. We chose a pine tree that had a cleft in it—actually the sixth in a row of pines, near a football field. Katzenelson stood guard while I dug up the ground, but as soon as anyone appeared he signalled to me, whereupon I would throw my coat over the hole that I made and we both seated ourselves on a bench and pretended to be reading the newspaper. In this way I was able to hide the bottles deep in the ground beneath the roots of the pine tree. After I had heaped up the soil over the hole, I scattered some dry leaves over the top. Little did I think that the day would come when I, myself, would unearth the treasures.<sup>12</sup>

With the help of a French woman who came in daily to do laundry work, Miriam Novitch also succeeded in smuggling out the *Vittel Notebook* and other writings, which remained concealed in tin containers until the day of liberation.

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10. Nathan Eck, "The Rescue of Jews with the Aid of Passports and Citizenship Papers of Latin American States," *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance* (Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 125-152; Nathan Eck, "Yehudim Temurat Germanim," *DAPPIM* II: 23-49 (Hebrew).

11. *Ibid.*

12. Biographical notes to the English edition of the *Vittel Diary* (*Hakibbuz Hameuḥad*, 1972), pp. 38-39.



## The Vast Variety of Aggadah

*Aggadah and its Development.* By JOSEPH HEINEMANN. Jerusalem. Keter, 1974. 252 pp. (Hebrew).

Reviewed by JAKOB J. PETUCHOWSKI

WHO OF US has not been in the habit of invoking a certain aggadic statement, particularly at Passover time, which is supposed to demonstrate Judaism's unequivocal universalism? The aggadic statement which we have in mind is God's rebuking the angels when they wanted to join the Israelites in singing the Song of the Reed Sea. "The work of My hands is drowning in the sea," God is supposed to have said to the angels. "Yet you want to sing!" (See, for example, the quotation from B. *Sanhedrin* 39b which introduces the "Ten Plagues" in the *New Union Haggadah*, p. 48.)

Now it turns out that this is but *one* version—a Babylonian one, at that—of an aggadic motif which, in its several Palestinian versions, leads to quite a different message. In neither version, by the way, do the angels want to join the Israelites in the singing of Exodus, chapter 15. Instead, God is preventing the angels from intoning their daily *trisaḡion*. Nor, as all of the contexts and adduced proof-texts make clear, does this divine interference with the angelic chant take place *after* the Israelites had crossed the Sea of Reeds, but, rather, *before* that crossing, while the Israelites found themselves between the pursuing Egyptians and "the sea closed in front of them."

It is, moreover, only the Babylonian version of the *aggadah* which has God refer to "the work of My hands." The Palestinian versions have Him speak about "My

children" or about "My beloved ones." Both of the latter appellations clearly refer to Israel, and not to the Egyptians. God was so concerned about *Israel's* distress that He did not want the angels to sing His praise. That is the way the story was told in Palestine; and it is a story of Palestinian origin.

When, however, the story was retold in Babylonia, its point was changed so that it would express God's concern for the Egyptians. Why that change? Because, when retold by a Babylonian Amora, the story figured in a Purim (not a Passover) sermon. Purim had its problems for the Babylonian Jews. They were, after all, living in the territory once ruled over by Ahasuerus. Any gloating over the slaying of Ahasuerus' subjects, in the very territory where the slaying occurred, must have led to some rather ambivalent sentiments which, in turn, found expression in the "universalist" twist given to an old "particularist" *aggadah*.

This is but one example out of many in this book, showing us Professor Heinemann's methodology in the study of *Aggadah*. It just is not enough to know only one version of a particular *aggadah*. One must know all the parallels. Only then may one venture to determine under what conditions and circumstances a certain aggadic motif originated, and only then can one look for the questions and the challenges to which this *aggadah* was made to respond—bearing in mind that one and the same *aggadah* (as is demonstrated by the story of how God made the angels desist from song) may lead to different, and sometimes contradictory, conclusions at different times and in different places.

Heinemann's treatment of the

well-known *aggadah* about God's "hawking" the Torah to other nations, before offering it to Israel, is another case in point. So are his discussions of the role of Melchizedek in Rabbinic literature (where his critique of this reviewer's own hypothesis is well taken), and his treatment of the "Messiah, son of Joseph (or Ephraim)," whose appearance was expected already before the time of Bar Kokhba, but whose "dying in battle," according to Heinemann, was a motif added only after Bar Kokhba's defeat.

The book also contains illuminating treatments of the nature of the *Aggadah* (which, contrary to some modern theories, Heinemann conclusively shows to have been originally an oral, and not a written tradition), of the Palestinian *Targumim* as repositories of ancient *aggadoth*, of the tendency of Babylonian Amoraim to deal with aggadic material without appreciating its occasional playfulness, and of the reworking of earlier *aggadoth* in the *Pirke de Rabbi Eli'ezer*. The footnotes provide ample documentation.

It goes without saying that such an approach to the realm of *Aggadah* requires a profound and extensive knowledge of the sources, which include the *Targumim* as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Halakhah* as well as *Aggadah*, and history as well as theology—not to mention a vast scholarly literature with which one has to come to terms before offering a *hiddush* of one's own. Heinemann shows himself a master in all of this; and it is to be hoped that he will treat us to his analysis of many more *aggadoth* than he was able to accommodate within the twelve chapters of this volume. In the meantime, however, for the sake of one's students and for the sake of the general Jewish and non-Jewish reader with an interest in Rabbinics, an English

translation of the present volume is an urgent *desideratum*.

After reading this book, one can never again with a clear conscience delve into the vast reaches of aggadic literature, come up with a stray quotation, and then solemnly declare: "Rabbinic Judaism teaches that . . ." One will first have to find satisfactory answers to the questions raised by form criticism and exemplified by Heinemann's approach. That, at any rate, goes for the historian of ideas and for the theologian. If, however, the preacher feels tempted to "twist" the point of a transmitted *aggadah*, well, that, after all, as Heinemann has shown, is what preachers have always been doing—as is proved by the history and by the development of the *Aggadah* itself.

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## Jews Always Studied

*Lifelong Learning Among Jews: Adult Education in Judaism from Biblical Times to the Twentieth Century*. By ISRAEL M. GOLDMAN, with an Introduction by Louis Finkelstein. New York. Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1975. 364 + xxii pp. \$15.00.

Reviewed by MARVIN S. WIENER

## I

IT IS RELIABLY estimated that some 30,000 new books (40,000, if one includes new editions of previous works) are published in the United States each year. Of most of these it can be asked: "What new material does this come to teach us?" Happily, the volume under review belongs to that minority of works

which truly represents a meaningful addition to the sum of human knowledge. Rabbi Israel M. Goldman has undertaken to write the history of adult Jewish education—broadly defined—and succeeds admirably in conveying both the tone and the text. He has written a volume which provides us with a grand overview, buttressed by rich documentation from pertinent sources. As Dr. Louis Finkelstein points out in his Introduction,

He has not only brought together all the material available in published books, but has gone to manuscript sources in order to complete the record. With all this material in hand, we are ready, for the first time, to appreciate what Jewish learning meant for our ancestors, as it means for so many of us (p. vii).

## II

In taking any volume in hand, it is important to know the credentials of its author. Dr. Goldman has served as congregational rabbi for upwards of four decades. At the same time, he has been in the forefront of the adult Jewish education movement as teacher and administrator. As founding director of the National Academy for Adult Jewish Studies in 1940, he organized a national program of adult study for the congregations of the United Synagogue of America, thereby giving content and form to local efforts. Rabbi Goldman is also an historian of note, having previously published his research into the life and times of the *Radbaz*. In sum, what we now have before us is the fruit of a lifetime of study and of activity in adult Jewish education. It is a rich harvest.

## III

It is only within the past hundred years or so that studies in the history of Jewish education have been undertaken by such men

as Tscharno, Guedemann, Asaf, Fischman, Gamoran and Scharfs-tein. Yet their works have dealt almost exclusively with the education of children. To date, no full-scale volume has treated the history of *adult* Jewish education. This, then, is the lacuna which *Lifelong Learning Among Jews* comes to fill. In sixteen chapters, we are presented with a description of various facets of adult learning in Jewish life, accompanied by copious selections of source material. (There are some 815 notes, some of which are really several notes in one!) The quoted material is drawn from primary sources: manuscripts from the libraries of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Yeshiva University, YIVO and the author's private collection, and printed works in Hebrew, Yiddish, German, French and English.

To the reader's advantage, Goldman takes an appropriately broad definition of his subject. Hence, he deals with such diverse topics as: Torah in Biblical times; the historical Synagogue as a source of instruction; the nature and function of the *Bet Midrash*; the relation between study and prayer; adult learning as reflected in the Talmud; the Gaonic period and the institution of the *Kallah*; the light of learning in the darkness of the Middle Ages; Jewish ethical wills; selections from the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Shulhan Arukh* dealing with adult study; the Jewish community and Jewish learning; the study programs of the various *hevrot* organized for purposes other than study; *hevrot* organized exclusively for adult study; an examination of the Minute-Books of the adult study *hevrot*; sketches of Jewish cultural life in the last century; the Jewish love of books; a brief overview of adult Jewish education in the twentieth century.

Goldman describes how each of these subjects serves to illustrate the high priority of adult study in the Jewish tradition from earliest

times, and goes on to limn the institutions created as embodiments of that priority. Withal, the most moving pages of the volume (occupying approximately one-quarter of the entire volume and representing Goldman at his creative best) are the ones which describe the various *hevrot* and their programs for Jewish study.

The author divides the various associations of the community into two categories: those organized primarily for purposes other than study, but which, nonetheless, included programs of Jewish learning; and those organized primarily for the purpose of systematic study of Jewish materials.

Of the first category he notes (p. 173):

In every Jewish community in past ages, the *hevrah*—a duly constituted society for the promotion of certain specified occupational, charitable, religious, or educational purposes—was the most significant unit of voluntary association. *Hevrot* were found wherever there were Jews, each of these confraternities bearing the appellation of “*kaddisha*,” for each such group was a sacred society or holy brotherhood. . . . There were holy brotherhoods of all kinds, as is indicated by their very names. Thus, to pick almost at random, one might mention the Holy Brotherhood of Tailors, the Holy Brotherhood of Woodchoppers, . . . the Holy Brotherhood for Dowering the Bride, the Holy Brotherhood for Visiting the Sick, and the Holy Brotherhood for Lovingkindness.

Goldman describes a vast network of formal study programs incorporated into the activities of these *hevrot*, many of which had originally been organized for economic reasons by occupation (bakers, carpenters, tailors, leatherworkers, shoemakers, weavers, glaziers, bookbinders, tinsmiths, etc.). The record of one such group—the *Hevrah Kenessiah le-Shem Shamayim* of Venice—extends

over a period of 232 years (from 1611 to 1843)! Its revised statutes (drawn up in 1612) include the following regulations:

In the wintertime the study session shall be held at night, and in the summertime during the afternoon. . . . *The parnasim are not exempted from this rule* (italics supplied). As soon as the rabbi enters, the study period begins. . . . The *parnasim* . . . shall find a place, agreeable to the rabbi, for purposes of study. . . . The *parnasim* shall make an inventory of the library each *Rosh Hodesh*. . . . Each and every member of the society is obliged to come to study each day—both summer and winter (pp. 179-180).

It should be noted that the various *hevrot* made provision for daily prayer services, some of which were preceded or followed by study sessions. In addition, study sessions were held at times other than in proximity to *Shaharit*, *Minhah* or *Ma'ariv*.

Interesting as is this information on the *hevrot* which were formed for purposes other than study, the chapters describing the *hevrot* that were organized primarily for Jewish learning, and the written records of these groups, are the high point of the volume. The reader is treated to a view of many lands—the Ottoman Empire (including *Erez Yisrael*), the German countries, Italy, Eastern Europe, America. The programs of various *hevrot* are described in terms of the subject matter to whose study they were dedicated: Psalms, the Bible generally (*Neviim* and *Ketuvim* as well as *Humash*), Codes, Moral and Ethical literature (*Ein Yaakov*, *Menorat ha-Maor*, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, *Mesillat Yesharim*), *Mishnah*, and—at the apex—*Talmud*.

The Minute-Books preserve many nuggets of historical interest. The preamble to the *pinkas* of the *Hevrah Mikra* of Gombin, Poland (founded in 1792) explains why, in

this center of *Talmudic* learning, forty-four members gathered together to form an association for the study of the entire Bible. Lamenting the neglect of the study of the Bible caused by an overemphasis on the study of the Talmud, the preamble notes:

If the people will see that the learned Jews set aside time in study groups for the study of the twenty-four books of the Bible, then they will not consider it unbecoming to do likewise. But if the learned men abstain from studying Scripture because it is beneath their dignity, then the masses of the people will be adversely influenced. . . . We herewith establish the *Hevrah Mikra* to study the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. We shall do so daily toward evening and in their proper order (p. 223).

#### IV

What are some of the insights to be gleaned from the panorama of adult Jewish study which Goldman supplies?

(1) The Jewish education which assured the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people over the centuries was far from limited to children. On the contrary, there was a vast array of opportunities for adult study supplied both within and without the Synagogue. The "Jewish street" reflected the high value placed on Torah learning for all. We have here a careful documentation of Professor Louis Ginzberg's observation, "In the olden time the opinion prevailed that the fathers were to be educated first and then the children, not in the reverse order" (*Students, Scholars and Saints*, p. 87).

(2) The position of the "anti-lachrymose" school of Jewish history, led by Professor Salo Baron, is amply documented here. In addition to the delight occasioned by study *per se*, the record is replete with reflections of the joy of Jewish life as represented in the many oc-

casions of *simhah shel mizvah* that study provided. Such festivities took place on *Shabbat Bereshit*, *Tu Bi'Shevat*, *Hanukkah*, *Shavuot*, *Hoshana Rabbah*, *Simhat Torah*, at *siyumim* and when new members were inducted. On the fifth of Nisan, 1843, the *Hevrah Aggadata* of Bosk, Russia, held its *siyum* upon completing the *Ein Yaakov*. Its *pin-kas* records:

We celebrated for two whole days. On Tuesday we finished the *Aggadata* and we made a party and a festive day. We invited 123 guests, not counting the musicians and the fifteen beadles. Four different and elaborate courses were served. The food was so plentiful that it was left over on the plates. . . . Our joy was exceedingly great. Wine poured like water. . . . On Wednesday we began again the study of the *Aggadata* and we obligated ourselves to study the *Ein Yaakov*. On that day, too, we made a great feast. The people made merry with trumpets and violins until, it seemed, the earth would split with the noise. The people who stood outside envied us our joy and our *simhah shel mitzvah* (pp. 229-230).

(3) The curriculum of adult study, taken as a whole, was much broader than usually conceived. Going back several centuries to what were the "Jewish Middle Ages," Goldman documents the wide-ranging choice of subject matter available to all, regardless of rank or station or degree of previous learning.

(4) The various groups showed a deep respect for history and kept a meticulous record of their activities, sometimes ranging not over years or decades but over centuries. Well may we ask to what degree today we are maintaining a similar record of our own parallel educational activities.

(5) The pattern of adult learning reflects a picture of highly developed communal structures, whether organized according to trade or occupation, a particular

*mizvah* to be emphasized or subject to be studied. Torah was, indeed, an integral part of the fabric of Jewish life, for the more learned as well as the less learned.

# V

*Lifelong Learning Among Jews*, with its richness of detail, whets the reader's appetite for more information about adult Jewish study. Perhaps a disciple of Goldman will set down for us a picture of historic Jewish communities in parts of the world not treated in the present volume. An appropriate sequel would also include a description of the situation today in the United States—the variety of subjects studied, the levels of learning, methods employed, how and by whom programs are sponsored. Our own time has seen many innovations and positive features—the study of more difficult subject matter than that treated just a decade or two ago (e.g., the growing popularity of the study of Talmud, Mishnah and Midrash); the study of Jewish history in depth over a period of years rather than “bird’s-eye views”; the equal participation of women in Jewish study programs—to mention but three.

It is to be hoped that *Lifelong Learning Among Jews* will find its way not only into libraries but into the hands of every concerned Jew. Despite its encyclopedic coverage, it is eminently readable. Incidentally, a large readership will provide an ancillary benefit: a second printing will make possible the correction of some typographical errors and minor inconsistencies not appropriate to an otherwise splendid contribution to Judaica.

*Sofo shel davar*: Rabbi Israel M. Goldman is to be congratulated for this work. Both we and future generations are in his debt.

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## A Variety of Theological Approaches

*Contemporary Jewish Philosophies*. By WILLIAM E. KAUFMAN. New York. Reconstructionist Press and Behrman House, 1976. 276 pp. \$12.50

Reviewed by ELLIOT B. GERTEL

A BOOK THAT clarifies the ideas of Jewish philosophers is always welcome, for it can only serve to stimulate a more thoughtful Jewish life. Rabbi Kaufman's helpful volume is dedicated to the premise that “unless people are aware of alternate theologies, a tragedy can simply demolish a naive faith” (p. 9). Theological investigations require intellectual modesty, “a willingness to limit our claims to what we can know from human experience” (p. 14). This restraint can, of course, be interpreted as humanistic arrogance, but it does make for a viable and challenging approach.

Kaufman describes this approach as “pragmatic”: “The real meaning of pragmatism is . . . that one must consider the significant consequences of a belief for human life. Does a belief render life more meaningful, more worthwhile? Does it foster man's nobler impulses? Does it generate hope for man?” (p. 21). He adheres most impressively to these criteria. The book succeeds as an educational tool because its consistent criteria of investigation will stimulate thought and discussion.

Those criteria yield many on-target criticisms, particularly of Jewish existentialists. Kaufman shows that Rosenzweig inconsistently describes the Jewish people as both “metaphysical” and as a “blood community” (p. 46). Buber foolishly dismissed the “vexatious Talmud,” and created a private notion of the dialogical voice of God. Kaufman also shows how Rubenstein rather ambivalently described the Holocaust as evil beyond



evil—until he became fascinated with a more contemporary evil. This is typical of the existential psyche which is generally motivated by both its most sustained and its most immediate anxieties. Kaufman interestingly describes Rubenstein's God as "a *deus ex machina* invoked to legitimize his theology as *theo-logy* . . ." (p. 90), and notes well Rubenstein's rhetorical craftiness: "When he attempts to shock, he waxes pagan and speaks of God as cannibal mother goddess. In his more sophisticated essays, he waxes philosophical and speaks of God as Holy Nothingness" (p. 88). In all fairness, however, Rubenstein does distinguish between earth as mother-goddess and God as Holy Nothingness, and even his most "pagan" essays are sophisticated. Perhaps this is why he has been dismissed as a leper by those unable, or unwilling, to answer him on a sophisticated level. Fortunately and commendably, Kaufman realizes that he is a mind to be reckoned with, and does not facetiously dismiss him.

Particularly necessary, I think, are Kaufman's critiques of the perennially popular "covenant theology." He asks whether Eugene Borowitz means "tradition according to the Bible, the Talmud, or the Codes? Or does he mean the tradition sung about in *Fiddler on the Roof*?" (p. 100). Existentialist theologians treat tradition and revelation with equal vagueness. And Kaufman correctly observes that Fackenheim "exceeds the domains of propriety when he compares his 'Voice of Auschwitz' to the Voice of Sinai" (p. 116). No one will deny that the Holocaust is our most agonizing test of faith. It is ironic, however, that instead of precipitating endless yearning for redemption, it has become a new testament of revelation!

Yet we must challenge some of Kaufman's appraisals of the Jewish existentialists. He dismisses Buber's concept of the "hiding

God" as a hide-and-seek game, thus ignoring the many pious Jews, including Isaiah and the Rebbe of Mezbizh, who found the concept "pragmatically" (and theologically) viable. He describes Rubenstein as "pessimistic" and does not regard psychoanalytic paganism as a way of "coping with reality." This judgment seems harsh. A Freudian view of life may vacillate between pleasure principle and fear of superego, but it is hardly "pessimistic." Kaufman also seems unfair when he chides Borowitz for writing about sin, punishment, God's will, and even God's responsibility (p. 102). One cannot so easily dismiss concepts to which, through the millenia, prophets, sages and saints have given their lives. Fackenheim is unjustly criticized for speaking of God's *sole* power while affirming human freedom (p. 113). Yet we can be perfectly (and legitimately) comfortable in regarding God as the *sole* Power Who "withdraws," as it were, to bestow human freedom.

Kaufman's criteria seem to fail him somewhat in his treatment of "transcendence," but he does continue to offer many valid insights and fair criticisms. His discussion of Leo Baeck is sympathetic and fine. While wary of Baeck's concept of "commandment" grounded in mystery, Kaufman finds strength in Baeck's "theological humility," as well as in his belief that "the Jewish people must elevate itself first and rediscover its own identity before it can even consider its mission to mankind" (p. 140).

Happily, Kaufman removes some old prejudices against Heschel by observing that he is *not* an existentialist (p. 155), and is not to be read merely for the aesthetics of his aphoristic sentences. Yet Kaufman does introduce some *new* prejudices. By declaring that Heschel has "no time for doubt, skepticism, or curiosity," Kaufman betrays neglect of Heschel's essay, "The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy," which is con-



spicuously absent from the bibliography. Likewise, Heschel's brief reference to "the triteness of our minds" (which is simply intended to describe the limitations of human knowledge) is blown up out of proportion, and interpreted as an unforgivable undermining of the human intellect, thus contradicting Heschel's conception of man as a symbol of God. Kaufman exaggerates, as well, in interpreting Heschel's observation that God "needs" man as indicating that "the dignity of man is purchased at the expense of God" (p. 167).

Indeed, Kaufman's criteria of analysis are not as suited to the study of Heschel's thought as is a sense of Hasidic humor and irony. This does not mean that Heschel is not to be taken seriously! As Kierkegaard said, every theologian is a comedian because he dares to justify his limited concepts with Divine attributes. But Kaufman's chapter on Heschel is amusing because he is *too* sympathetic. Heschel's critics do not give him sufficient credit. While Kaufman notes that polarity is a legitimate aspect of theological discourse, he fails to consider its authentic expression in literary irony, paradox and humor. True, paradox can be abused, but Schechter was correct when he said that the best theology need not be consistent. Heschel said that faith is an "answer to all human problems," as well as a "challenge to all human answers." Would Kaufman regard this as a blatant contradiction? Does one statement cancel out the other? Rabbi Kaufman's criteria of analysis cannot help us to appreciate such profound irony.

If Heschel receives unnecessary sympathy, Arthur A. Cohen is not given enough. It is not fair to dismiss his theology as "ill conceived because of its highly anthropomorphic tendency" (p. 227). Idolatry, and not anthropomorphism is the sin, and Cohen ought not be branded as "anthropomorphic" or "Christianized" because he is

sensitive to God's point of view! Kaufman does, however, offer a good critique of Jacob Agus's concept of the uniqueness of Jewish monotheism. (Since Agus is indebted to Yehezkel Kaufmann, our author should have elaborated on the thought of the latter.) Yet, I cannot understand why Arthur Cohen and Jacob Agus share the same chapter. Cohen is a nonpartisan thinker and writer who communicates from personal experience. Agus is best understood as a philosopher in dialogue with other Conservative ideologues: Ben Zion Bokser, Robert Gordis, Simon Greenberg, Mordecai Kaplan and Seymour Siegel. These men should have been discussed, even if briefly, along with Agus.

Mordecai Kaplan is the hero of the book. Kaufman's volume might be described as a Reconstructionist "christology" of Jewish thought, in the sense that all roads lead to Kaplan's concept of salvation. "Of all contemporary Jewish thinkers . . . Kaplan has reacted most vigorously and responded most creatively to the unique, unprecedented changes of the modern age" (p. 175). Repeatedly we are told that "Reconstructionism contains the promise of future Jewish thought. . . ." (p. 214) Kaplan is beyond criticism; his thought has been distorted by "misconceptions." (Perhaps this is why Kaufman does not discuss Milton Steinberg, Kaplan's most critical disciple.) Kaufman's devotion to Kaplan is explained in a moving autobiographical tribute, yet he sometimes exceeds even the limits of over-exuberance. He credits Kaplan with concluding that Jews need more than anti-Semitism to survive (a little too obvious to be ingenious), and declares that Kaplan is the "only living Jewish theologian who is constantly thinking and revising his idea of God," and who "is concerned with truth in and of itself" (p. 213).

Kaplan is glorified for "avoid-

ing" the problem of theodicy, and he is exonerated of the charge of remaking the universe in man's image by an affirmation that the cosmos is a "source of value potentialities" (p. 192). It may be true that *life* is a source of values, but this solution hardly justifies Kaplanism. Likewise, to regard God as the "integration of the parts[of the whole] into a new emergent reality" (as Kaufman requests that we interpret Kaplan) is to render Him less than One by regarding Him as nothing but an aspect of everything. Kaufman goes so far as to assert that *one* of Kaplan's sentences synthesizes concepts of existence, essence and transcendence: "... Judaism as an evolving religious civilization is *existentially* Jewish peoplehood, *essentially* Jewish religion, and *functionally* the Jewish way of life" (*The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence*, p. 300). It may well be the weakness of Reconstructionist pragmatism that such a patchwork thought is embraced as an intellectual salvation. Furthermore, if Heschel's God is "undignified" because of His "need" for man, what shall we say of Kaplan's cosmic process, which fulfills us with its "functionality." Kaplan is, of course, a fine teacher and prolific thinker, who is at his best as critic of *all* modern Jewish movements.

One wishes that Kaufman had taken his cue from Kaplan in regarding Neo-Orthodox thinkers as worthy of analysis. The failure to devote space to Eliezer Berkovits, Emanuel Rackman, and Joseph Soloveitchik (not to mention Nor-

man Lamm, David Shapiro, Shubert Spero, and others) is a shocking omission. It is unfair, and limits the scope of the book. Also missing is an analysis of the thought of Jacob Kohn, who was the finest metaphysician of the American rabbinate and perhaps its best mind, as well as an effective critic of Kaplan.

While Kaufman's book is most readable, with an excellent choice of citations, there are trite and unnecessary transition sentences between sections. An occasional awkwardness in style should have been noticed by the editors. Also, \$12.50 for a small 276-page hard-cover seems a little unreasonable. (There is, however, a paperback edition.)

All in all, Rabbi Kaufman is to be commended for genuine concern for the meaning of each thinker, for the strengths as well as the weaknesses. He is a patient and helpful teacher whose book will benefit student and scholar alike. And we can hardly blame him for writing as a disciple of the Master Analyst, Mordecai M. Kaplan. Reconstructionism may well offer the most challenging critiques of modern Jewish thought, but the spiritual yearnings and intellectual proclivities of contemporary Jewish thinkers are the most devastating critiques of the promises and claims of Reconstructionism.

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